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LA BEATA.

VOLUME I.



L A B E A T A.

BY

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“ A DECADE OF ITALIAN WOMEN,” “ THE GIRLHOOD OF CATHERINE
DE MEDICI,” “ PAUL THE POPE AND PAUL THE FRIAR,”
ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193 PICCADILLY.
1861.

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LA BEATA.

CHAPTER I.

A STUDIO IN THE VIA DELL' AMORE.

IT does not follow that all the world who know Florence, "that city of flowers, and flower of cities," are equally cognizant of the *Via dell' Amore*. Not only is a six months' residence in the fair city quite compatible with entire ignorance of the locality in question, but it is very possible that a long life might be passed on the banks of the Arno without making the oldest inhabitant acquainted with it. Many Florentines too may be aware of the existence of such a

street, and yet be ignorant of its somewhat romantic name; for the Tuscans have an inveterate habit of disregarding the official municipal nomenclature of their venerable cities, and adhering to ancient traditional names or nick-names. Thus a house or shop which modern precision would define as number so-and-so in such-and-such a street, the genuine Florentine cockney, born and bred beneath the shadow of Giotto's *campanile*, persists in describing as "near St. This or St. That," "by the side of such a *Loggia*," "opposite *Palazzo* So-and-so," or "hard by this or that Corner;"—names of which the origin must be sought probably in Florentine history of the 13th or 14th century,—the *Loggia*, or open arcade, having long since ceased to exist; the *Palazzo* being named from some long since extinct family; and the Corner having been so nick-named from some all-but-forgotten event or individual.

It may be, therefore, that the house in the

Via dell' Amore, to which I wish to introduce the reader, was known to the generation of Florentines now gradually passing from the scene under some such appellation; for the dwelling, though the street is an obscure one, was once not altogether destitute of pretension. The city of Florence is, and has always been, wholly without the institution of a West End. There is no exclusively aristocratic quarter. Fine old mansions with grand historic names are found in all parts of the city, surrounded by the dwellings of every class of the population. The fact is an interesting indication of the old thoroughly democratic constitution of society, which gained for Florence the appellation of "the most republican of republics."

The "Via dell' Amore" is in the parish of San Lorenzo;—in the "*Popolo di San Lorenzo*," to use the popular and ancient Florentine phrase;—the tribe of San Lorenzo, as the word *popolo* can only be in this

case translated—a phrase characteristic of the times, when every local and territorial division was understood to imply a bond of union among its inhabitants, and a separating disunion from all other neighbours. It is not distant from the historical old church which gives its name to the parish; and though the streets are crowded and narrow in that part of the old city, the fourth-story windows of the house in question look out on the red dome of that chapel at the east end of the church under which the Medici sleep, apparently at only a few yards' distance. It is to that fourth story that the reader must be invited to climb. But the stair is neither a difficult nor a dirty one. The house is evidently inhabited by respectable tax-paying citizens. Everything is in decent order and good repair; and the stone stair is broad and easy in its acclivity even to the top. The number of these stone stairs, however, would seem to a Londoner or a

Parisian far more than enough to carry him to a fourth story. But Florentine houses are not divided into a number of horizontal slices, each but a little thicker than the average height of a man. To reach the fourth floor of a good old-fashioned dwelling-house in Florence, it is necessary to ascend in all probability some fifty feet.

Visitors to the studio of Filippo Lonari had to climb at least to that altitude; and it must have been extremely provoking to all those unsuccessful climbers, who had covered the door and the surrounding white wall with announcements of their visit in pencil or charcoal,—in many cases accompanied by a caricature portrait of the absent artist,—to have made the ascent in vain.

Specially such may be supposed to have been the case if all those stairs had been mounted on a very hot Sunday afternoon in August, as the reader must, necessarily for the purposes of our story, be invited at least

in imagination to do. But he need not, like those other flesh and blood visitors, be kept waiting while a sweet silvery voice, very unlike that which might be supposed to come from the chest of Signor Filippo Lonari, demands in answer to the little tinkle produced by pulling a bit of twine passed through a gimlet-hole in the door, “Chi è?”—who is there? The applicant for admission replies by the regulation open sesame, “Amici!”—Friends!—and the door is forthwith opened. The timid Florentine housewife, often alone in her dwelling, seems to fancy that she has thus provided against all danger of admitting an unwelcome intruder. But it is difficult to comprehend what should prevent the most evil-minded cut-throat from using the well-known talisman. The simple women seem to imagine that their precautionary question would be at once responded to by the answer “Thieves!” if thieves they were who knocked.

The sweet silver voice, however, would probably not have deemed it necessary to go through this customary little drama on the present occasion ; for its owner was protected by the presence, not only of the master of the dwelling, whom she of the silver voice was wont to consider an amply sufficient guardian against all sublunary evils and dangers whatever, but by that of another member of the stronger sex also. Before proceeding, however, to make acquaintance with the inmates of the studio in the *Via dell' Amore*, it will be well to obtain a somewhat clearer idea of the place itself.

It was visible at a glance that the painter's home consisted of one room only. But it was a very large and a very lofty one. Many a snug suite of apartments in London or in Paris contains far fewer cubic feet of space than Filippo Lonari's one room. The occupiers, moreover, of such snug and comparatively costly lodgings would, especially

if artists, be very glad to purchase, at the cost of a double rent, the pure, unbroken light which streamed into the Florentine painter's studio from a very large window high in the wall to the north, through which the eye saw nothing but a wide tract of azure sky. Another window, at right angles to this, and placed lower in the wall, without the slightest regard to symmetry of arrangement, gave a view, over the tops of the intervening houses, of the red dome of San Lorenzo. Both windows were void of curtains, but were furnished; the smaller and lower one with a bit of matting in the guise of blind on the outside, and the large north window with a huge screen of paper stretched on a light wooden frame, fixed by hinges to the upper part of the window-frame, and so contrived as by means of a string and a pulley to admit the light in whatever degree and at whatever angle might be wished. The matting blind and the paper screen are both

entirely drawn down on the present occasion, for the artist is not at work; and the main object is to exclude as much as possible of the blazing August sunshine and heated outer air, which is making the apartment, large and airy as it is, feel almost like an oven. This heat in summer, and cold quite proportionably excessive in winter, are the great drawbacks to the eligibility of the residence. And the cause of these evils is but too apparent at the first glance. The huge room has no ceiling. The naked tiles of the roof, and the rafters which support them, lie in a gently sloping position over the wide extent of it. A ceiling would increase the comfort of the dwelling a hundred per cent., raise the rent perhaps ten per cent., and yield twenty per cent. of profit on the outlay to the proprietor. But the proprietor is too short of ready money to incur the expense, and the tenant would certainly shrink from any increase of his

rent. So the heat and the cold are endured patiently among other irremediable evils. Some attempt, indeed, has been made to alleviate the discomfort in that corner of the room which has been partitioned off by an arrangement of screens, and serves for a bed-chamber. A kind of canopy of matting has been suspended above this portion of the habitation.

In the middle of the room, well under the light from the great north window, there is a low raised platform, some ten feet square, covered with an old bit of red baize. In the centre of this a lay figure is standing, draped into some resemblance to the well-known figure of Dante in the recently discovered fresco on the chapel wall of the Bargello at Florence. At a little distance is an easel with a large canvas turned with its front downwards. The furniture is very scanty in quantity, and quaint and heterogeneous rather than shabby in quality. At

a little distance from the platform, and with its back to the larger window, but at a considerable distance from the wall, is a sofa with the slender, fluted, gilt legs of the time of the first French empire. Its green silk covering and cushions are in tolerably decent repair. Before it stands one of those oblong tables of ebony, ornamented with inlaid ivory, which are so frequently met with in Florence, and of which so many have been carried thence to fit up *rococo* drawing-rooms in Paris and London. A couple of coarse white plates, a broken crust of bread, and an empty flask, with its old discoloured rush casing, are on the table, and contrast strangely with its handsome polished surface and costly elegance. A few rush-bottomed chairs are ranged round the far back walls of the room ; but in the vicinity of the easel, the sofa, and the table, there are two chairs of a kind which seems to have constituted the only tolerably comfortable seat known to the

world three hundred years ago. They are made somewhat on the principle of a campstool of solid old walnut-wood, with a stout bit of once red leather for the seat, and another broad strip of the same material once richly gilt for the back. There is also a small walnut-wood chair with a high carved back, belonging to the same epoch; astride which, with his arms resting on that high back, sits the master of the house. The brick floor of the great, almost barn-like room is totally uncovered, and—at least to English eyes—adds to the appearance of inhabitable discomfort. In winter, however, a piece of thick matting would supply the place of carpet in that part of the room in which the above-mentioned objects are congregated. And in summer the bare bricks are for more than one reason preferable to wooden flooring.

All round the walls, which are ornamented with large red panels in stucco-coloured

frames painted in fresco, is hung, and otherwise arranged, a miscellaneous collection of all that not unpicturesque lumber generally found in artists' studios. There are casts of heads, and arms, and legs, *torsos* and busts in plaster of Paris, some placed on brackets, some simply pendent from a nail in the wall. There are unfinished canvasses in every stage of progress, representing subjects of every description. The majority of these, however, are on the floor, with their faces—unpleasantly commemorative of failure or want of perseverance—turned to the wall. There are sketches in white or coloured chalk on coarse blue or brown paper, hung without the slightest regard to symmetry on all the walls. They are memoranda of ideas to the artist; but to any other eye the strangest phantasmagoric nightmare procession of distorted limbs and caricatured features imaginable.

The only conscious attempt at ornament

is manifested in the centre of the wall opposite the entrance. There stands one of those well-known carved walnut-wood chests, in which the Florentine brides of three centuries since carried with them their outfit of braveries; no fashions of a season, to be refashioned or become a ladies-maid's perquisites the next; but jewelled brocades, and armour-like gold-woven tissues destined to figure fifty years later in the fair owner's last will and testament. Nor have these honestly wrought handiworks of fingers, gone to dust three hundred years ago, even yet reached entirely that inevitable consummation; for on the wall, above the handsome chest, is suspended a piece, some four feet square, of still unfaded rich crimson silk, with broken remains of golden embroidery around it. Small doubt but that that piece of silk has rustled in the saloons of some one of the earlier Medicean princes. Now it serves as a background for a couple of hal-

berds and two pair of ancient swords, its contemporaries, and a helmet, surviving from a still earlier generation, arranged trophy-wise on the wall of the artist's garret. Above these is a large cast of the well-known bust of Michael Angelo, with a withered wreath of bay-leaves on its plaster brow.

It is perhaps not strictly correct to say that these objects form the only conscious attempt at ornament in the artist's chamber; for on the old green silk sofa with the gilded spindle legs is reposing the well-cared-for person of Tito Fanetti, the friend, brother-artist, and comrade of the master of the apartment. And Tito clearly embodies a conscious attempt at being ornamental. His small, plump, well-to-do looking person is encased in a pair of white trousers, supported by a red silk scarf round the waist in lieu of braces, and a jauntily cut and abundantly laced velveteen coat, which, being unbuttoned, discloses the absence of any

waistcoat, and the presence of a perfectly clean and elaborately embroidered, but not very fine coloured shirt. His good-humoured fresh-coloured face is ornamented by a carefully got up light-brown moustache and tuft on the chin, as well as by an intelligent laughing blue eye. And the round, rather bullet-headed, but not badly developed brow is surmounted by a jauntily set on straw hat with a broad black ribbon band. The entire appearance, in short, of Tito Fanetti bespeaks a degree of well-being and prosperity which is in unpleasant contrast with that of his companions, and with the general air of their abode.

“It won’t do, Pippo!” exclaimed the more successful artist, springing from his recumbent position on the sofa, and flinging on the brick floor the end of the cigar he had been smoking; “it won’t do, Pippo. It is not right, and all the talking in the world won’t make it right! I don’t want to be hard on you . . .”

“And I am ready to make all excuses for you !” retorted Pippo, whose attitude on the old-fashioned, carved chair has been described. He was a taller and far handsomer man than his spruce and prosperous friend. The latter might have passed for an Englishman. But the genuine Italian type of face of Filippo or Pippo Lonari could not be mistaken. It was one of those classical, oval, regular-featured, olive-complexioned faces, with well-shaped, liquid brown eyes, and the usual abundance of black whisker, moustache, and beard, which are so undeniably handsome, but so difficult to remember, and which seem all so like to one another ; a monotony of appearance which is doubtless caused by the absence of expression arising from the concealment of the mouth, that tell-tale feature which more than any other reveals the moral nature of the man. Pippo was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, a costume which the heat of that August afternoon

under the tiles rendered agreeable and excusable. But the shirt was neither as smart nor as irreproachably clean as that of his friend. His long legs, which were stretched out in front of him on either side of the chair he was bestriding, were clothed in a pair of linen trousers, on which a similar remark might be made. And the natty smart red scarf at the waist was also wanting.

“I am ready to make all excuse for you too!” retorted he, in answer to Tito’s oburgation; “it is so easy to preach and play the mentor, when one has just had a good dinner, and all goes well, and it must be extremely agreeable too, I suppose; though I never had an opportunity of trying the sensation. But I make allowance for temptation, and don’t want, as you say, to be hard on you.”

“I avail myself of your indulgence,” returned Tito, with undiminished good humour, “and proceed with my sermon. I

say that the artist, who paints a picture in imitation of the old masters, with the knowledge that the dealer for whom he executes the commission will sell it as an old picture, is only one degree less dishonest than the dealer."

"What nonsense to talk of dishonesty!" rejoined Pippo. "Where can be the dishonesty of executing to the best of one's ability a commission entrusted to one? What have I to do with what my employer does with his purchase afterwards?"

"I don't call it honest," persisted the other, "to be so far the accomplice of a fraud as to furnish the means without which it could not be committed. All such things are, moreover, exceedingly injurious to the dignity of the profession, and so do mischief to us all."

"I'll tell you what it is, friend Tito. It's my opinion that a decent dinner—say a leg and wing of a fowl and half a flask of good

Chianti—is essential to a proper appreciation of the dignity of the profession. No doubt, you feel it thoroughly. I'll be bound you have nourished the noble sentiment this very day with a good Milanese rice soup, and a prime cut from a forequarter of lamb in addition to the fowl and the Chianti. A nice morsel of Parmesan, a couple of peaches from Pian di Ripoli, and a cup of coffee to finish with, have just brought you up to the pitch of professional dignity proper for lecturing a poor devil, who can hardly keep body and soul together. My dinner to-day was a morsel of sausage, a crust, and a couple of baked pears. And as for *La Beata* there, I fancy she dined on the sausage skin. Let me tell you that under such circumstances a regard for the dignity of the profession does not come very forcibly home to one."

"I plead guilty to the good dinner," returned Tito, good-humouredly, "and am far from wishing to deny the fine moral effects

you attribute to it. But joking apart, Pippo, I should not say a word, if I were not sure that you could do better. Look at me now. My work is as regular . . .”

“Oh yes! no doubt!” cried Pippo; “but everybody cannot have the largest picture dealer in Florence for one’s brother-in-law. And after all, what is Signor Francesco able to do for you? Can he sell a picture of your own? He can keep you grinding away at copies to sell to English and Americans, who don’t know a Raffael from a Rubens; and that’s all.”

“Regular work, and regular pay, resulting in regular dinners, and the consequent high condition of moral sentiment which you attribute to them. Not very gratifying to artistic ambition certainly, but still honest work, honestly done. And even at that trade one may work dishonestly, as I need not tell you. There are plenty of second-hand copies, sold as copies from the original.

But when a copy has got ‘Copied from the original picture by me, Tito Fanetti,’ on its back, all Florence knows that there is no mistake about it.”

“But what the devil would you have me do?” urged Pippo, somewhat petulantly. “Besides, I won’t admit that there is anything dishonest, or approaching to dishonesty, in my work. Old Matteo Zanobi comes hobbling up to my garret here, and asks me to paint him a Flight into Egypt; — ‘a Botticelli, you know, my dear; on a circular panel. I will send you the panel, myself; and mind the tone is mellow,’ says the old fellow. And then there comes an old worm-eaten panel; and I set to work and make my picture as much like Botticelli as I can, just as you make your copies as like the originals as you can. What wrong is there in this?”

“The difference in the two cases is in the intention . . .”

“The intention!” interrupted Pippo; “that’s just what proves the absurdity of your scruples. I paint a picture with the intention of being paid a fair price for my labour. That is my final object. Now we all know that the lawfulness of every act depends, as the Church teaches . . .”

“Bosh!” interrupted Tito in his turn. “For goodness’ sake do let the Church alone. Who the deuce cares what she teaches? But you can’t forget your old trade.”

The truth was that Filippo Lonari had been educated by an uncle in an ecclesiastical seminary with a view to the priesthood. But on the death of that relative, before the time had come for him to receive the first orders, he had deserted the cassock for the brush. He possessed very considerable and real artistic capabilities, and his pictures were by no means devoid of merit, though they had failed as yet to procure him employment other than in the very

questionable line which he was now attempting to defend, and in which he had been particularly successful. His brother artists declared that he was ruined for life by the misfortune of his ecclesiastical education; and were by no means apt to receive favourably any of the little manifestations of it, which cropped out occasionally on the surface of his conversation.

“Never mind the Church! I would rather hear what La Beata thinks of the matter, two to one,” continued Tito, feeling probably that such an appeal was the most ignominious manner in which the doctrine of the Church could be refuted; for La Beata was not celebrated in her little world for cultivated powers of intellect.

Perhaps the reader has been expecting to hear before now something of the owner of the sweet voice, which was wont to ask ‘chi è?’ when visitors pulled the bell-string at Filippo Lonari’s door. To La Beata

herself, however, it would have appeared quite preposterous, that any notice should have been taken of her, before due attention had been paid to Pippo and his friend of the lordly sex ; or, indeed, that any notice should be taken of her at all, until she was forcibly brought on the scene, as it were, by Tito's direct appeal to her. But now that it has become absolutely necessary for the reader to make acquaintance with her, she shall not be presented to him at the fag end of a chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE WIDOW LETI AND HER DAUGHTER.

SHE had been sitting, while the conversation reported in the last chapter had been carried on between the two artists, on a corner of the low red-cloth-covered platform, at the feet of the grotesque lay figure Dante, as silent and as motionless as he, were it not for the rapid movement of her fingers industriously engaged in knitting a half-completed stocking. This occupation, the mysteries of which appeared just then to necessitate bending down the head and eyes over the work, together with the lowness of her seat, prevented any portion of her face from being visible except the even circumference of her marvellously long and regular eyelashes,

and the ivory white dome of a high and perfectly rounded but not broad forehead. The abundance of her light chestnut-coloured hair was indeed visible enough, and to especial advantage. It was carefully and skilfully arranged (for it was Sunday), in very large and broad braids on either side of the face, and in a huge and most artistically contrived knot at the back of her head; and the position which concealed her features caused a stray ray of sunshine, which was finding its way through an interstice in the mat before the window, to fall directly on the small well-shaped head and delicately-formed back of the neck, and fleck with glistening golden lights the ridges of the undulating braids. The figure was slight and delicately fashioned to a remarkable degree; and though the bust lacked that development which is deemed an essential attribute of adult womanly beauty, it was impossible not to be struck by the extreme

elegance of the carriage of the head upon the slender but well-rounded shoulders, and by the exquisite beauty of the line which curved from the tops of them up to the transparent rose-coloured little ear. The exceeding slenderness of the entire figure, which most connoisseurs would have judged too great for the perfection of female beauty, was not, as *La Beata* is now presented to the reader, at all concealed or relieved by any of the resources which female art possesses in abundance for such purposes. A dress of cheap and not very fine muslin, but of spotless whiteness, modishly made, and duly stiffened into the approved bell-like amplitude, was indeed at that moment hanging up, and occupying a very large part of the enclosure in one angle of the room, which has been mentioned. But this had been doffed with much precaution immediately on returning from mass that morning, to be resumed with equal care

when the hour for the evening *passeggiata*,—the dearly prized stroll with Pippo about the hour of the Ave Maria,—should have arrived. Neither the temperature nor Florentine bienséance in the class to which our new acquaintance belonged, at all required that this garment should be replaced indoors by any other. So La Beata remained *simplex munditiis* in her clean white petticoat, with a black silk handkerchief pinned over her shoulders. It was a disadvantage attending this costume, that it exposed to view an arm which, despite its perfect whiteness, the admirers of beautiful arms would not have approved. Fat women only have beautiful arms, and are surely well entitled to this only compensation for the misfortunes of their fatness. But La Béata's, all too lean and angular as it was, terminated in a wrist of the most exquisite formation, and a long slender hand, such as Vandyke would have loved to paint. It was decidedly an advan-

tage, too, of the undress in question, that its scantiness permitted to protrude from under it, the toe and instep of one of the prettiest imaginable feet,—a foot just somewhat slenderer in proportion to its length than that which a great statue might own,—a foot, which, unlike so many feet which pass for pretty, was unmistakably so when clad in a coarse cotton stocking, and very un-ornamental loose list slipper.

Her name, as ascertainable from the registers of the baptistry where the miraculous bronze gates of Andrea Pisano are the first which every infant Florentine passes through after leaving those of his native house, and ascertainable as such by scarcely any other means, was Annunziata Leti. Why in the world, then, was she called *La Beata*? Wait till she lifts her face, in reply to the appeal made to her by Tito, and you will catch the idea in an instant. Surely if angelic purity was ever expressed by earthly

lineaments, it is to be read in that delicately beautiful pale face. It is almost a perfect oval ; less beautiful, perhaps, and less suggestive of the possibilities of latent passion, than those so often assigned by Raffael to the Madonna, even in his earlier manner ; but such as Beato Angelico has, when happiest in the expression of his ideal, given to the angels of the heavenly choir. The features were not calculated to give a physiognomist the idea of much intellectual power, still less of energy or force of character. Unsympathetic critics might have declared that the face in its general effect was wanting in expression ; even that it was chargeable with insipidity. And this verdict might perhaps have been accepted without any violent contradiction by those who had looked on it only while those marvellous long eyelashes were, as was generally the case, veiling the large brown eyes beneath them. We hear of eyes sparkling with

intelligence, eyes eloquent with the force of strong volition, or flashing with the fire of latent passion. The eyes in question were none of these. But from their unfathomable limpid depths there welled forth with a mild and withal somewhat sad radiance that infinite capacity of loving, which, let it exist in companionship with whatsoever other gifts or deficiencies it may, is still the divinest thing on earth.

Preachers have abounded in warnings against the sin of permitting an earthly love, as they are wont to term it, to steal aught of the intensity due only they say to that which has the invisible for its object. But surely such teaching would reduce the earthly love it does permit, to a something which, when thus robbed of its right to infinity, would not be found exalting to humanity in its nature. Surely every love which deserves the name partakes of the nature of worship. And its justification for doing so is to be

found in the fact, that it is to the God-like, visible to the eye of love in its object, whether it be really existing there or not, that such worship is rendered. Illimitable trustfulness, perfect faith, entire belief are as essentially attributes of such a love, as is unspeakable tenderness. And all these might be read in those large, guileless, gentle eyes, when they spoke forth the innermost secrets of the heart, from which they had their message.

But this divine capacity of loving, rich with the promise of truly infinite blessedness to both the subject and the object of it,—can it be that it is blind, even as the terrestrial Eros? Can it be that its want of intellectual vision may make it the victim of the grossest illusions, and cause it to become a source of misery and destruction? Who does not know, alas! that the answer to such questionings is the oldest of all old stories, the tritest and the saddest of all his

world's tragedies ; tragedies to be repeated infinitely till time is at an end?—irremediable? Is it the doom of the most God-like natures ever to run the greatest risk of woe and shipwreck? Surely such cannot be the law of a God-made world. How if we conclude that this divinest endowment needs, like every other of man's heritage, the assistance of that other gift, the same which wards the lightning from our roofs, and bids it do our errands? that to taste in safety of the sweetest fruit of the tree of life we must eat of the tree of knowledge also? Shall Love be less divine because his eyes are opened? Shall Love's infinity be rendered finite, his faith be stained with doubt, his worship be abated to a balancing estimation because he sees with understanding the existence of the same qualities, which before he saw only in the illusions of his own phantasmagoria? Surely not so. Surely in this matter, as in every other sublunary destiny, we may look,

though it be with far straining gaze to the good time coming.

But meanwhile inexorable law, with cruelly beneficent teaching, rolls on its Juggernaut car, and the old sad story has to be told again and again.

La Beata could love much, but she could understand little. She was, in truth, very ignorant, was La Beata. She knew little indeed beyond what that large simple heart of hers could teach her. Not despicable knowledge this, yet not sufficient for the guidance she needed.

Her little history, up to the time of which our story is speaking, may be very briefly told. Her father had been a keeper, guardian, or whatever such office may be called, at the gallery of the Belle Arte, in Florence. Her mother was an artificial flower maker. Annunziata was their only child, and the small but certain stipend of her father, joined to the earnings of his wife's little

industry, sufficed to supply comfortably enough the simple wants of Florentines in that class of life. But Giovanni Leti died when his child was only three years old, and then came a life of struggle and privation for the widow and Annunziata. Still the wolf was kept from the door. By patient industry and careful thrift, Francesca Leti, the mother, still contrived to keep a decent roof over her child and herself. She inhabited two little rooms on the second floor in the street called the *Corso*, not, as might be gathered from the name, one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, but a small busy street in the thickest centre of the town. There she plied her trade, for the purposes of which it was not necessary to keep a shop, seeing that the little manufactory on the second floor was sufficiently well known to her small connection, and the principal part of her business consisted in supplying the shops of the more humble class of milliners.

There also little Annunziata “received her education.” But it consisted almost entirely in learning the art and mystery of artificial flower making, in which dainty occupation her delicate little fingers learned at a very early age to render her mother material assistance, and had become before she was sixteen very perfectly proficient. She was Nina in those days, as half the girls in Tuscany seem to be familiarly called. It is the pet abbreviation for so many names. Does the reader fail to see the mode of derivation by which Annunziata becomes Nina? It is quite simple to Tuscan tongues and ears. Annunziata is by abbreviation Nunziata, by the use of the never-failing affectionate diminutive Nunziatina, and thence, by familiar elision, Nina.

Nobody in those days thought that the widow Leti’s pale, fragile-looking girl was a pretty child. But the whole neighbourhood cited her as a shining example of all a

loving daughter should be to a widowed and struggling mother. She was, in truth, the one bright sunbeam in the cold pale shade of the widow's declining years. She was devoted to her mother with all the concentrated devotion of that deeply loving nature which had no other object on which to pour forth all the treasures of its abounding tenderness. Early and late the delicate little fingers busied themselves with cheerful activity over the coloured paper, the bits of stiffened calico, and the waxed thread, which formed the material of their industry. Summer and winter the pale young face grew paler, and the slender form, now rapidly shooting up into womanhood, more slight over the light but incessant labour, which made the life of both mother and daughter little better than one long imprisonment; but neither of them dreamed that they had anything to regret or to pine for in that dull obscure life of theirs. The daily

necessities were supplied, on a scale so wonderfully small and simple it is true, that that which appeared decent competence to the Florentine widow and her daughter, would have seemed to the poorest of our better nourished population a state of mere prolonged starvation. But the few small coins needed for the daily expenditure were forthcoming; and if, when autumn arrived, the hoarded fund for payment of the rent was ready, the mother and daughter asked no more of fate.

Nor had the poor widow failed to do her duty by her child to the best of her power and lights. She had received a good religious education, had La Nina. Due care had been taken, when she had reached her seventh year, to have her properly anointed with holy oil on the forehead on occasion of making her first solemn confession to Mother Church of the sins human nature is apt to fall into at that period of life. The sacred

unction had been duly bound on to her little forehead for the space of three days with a white fillet marked with a blood-red cross. No pains had been spared to send her to her first communion five years later, with a spotless new white frock, a pair of white satin slippers, and a wreath of white rose-blossoms on her brow. Never did the widow and her pale tall girl fail to attend early mass at a neighbouring church on every Sunday and holiday, whether it were "a day of entire obligation," or not,—not the dissipation of a mid-day mass, when smart toilettes are exhibited, and the world is there to see them, but a drowsy, utterly unamusing early morning mass at an obscure church, where there was neither necessity for, nor temptation to, the smallest exhibition of crinoline. Never in the widow's tiny household was the necessary farthing wanting for the supply of the glimmering spark of lamp before the black little picture of the

Madonna, of which it was impossible to distinguish anything save the shimmer of the tarnished gilt crown on the Virgin's head, even though that farthing had to be squeezed out of the price of the daily pittance of bread. Never had Nina, from the day of that first confession of her shortcomings, been so thoughtless as to pass this venerated talisman, which hung in the dark little passage opposite the door of entrance, without crossing herself and bending her gracious head. And above her own narrow and scantily furnished pallet, surmounting a small cross, and a couple of withered sprigs of olive bough, which in Tuscany does duty for the palm-branch, hung a French lithographed portrait of the Virgin of seven sorrows, with seven poniards plunged symmetrically in her bosom. And Nina used to think, as she preferred to this portraiture of her patroness her nightly petition for the successful completion and prosperous sale of the forget-me-nots and

lilies-of-the-valley, which had been the object of her day's labour, that *she* could never refuse aught to the appeal of eyes which looked on her with a glance so full of infinite love and ineffable sadness as that portrayed in the much-loved print.

And now the reader is as completely acquainted with the entire mind, heart, and soul of Nunziatina Leti as if he had made her daily life his study from her cradle upwards. Nay, had he possessed a spell by which to scan each innermost thought and movement of the heart, he would have discovered nothing beyond the combinations of ideas and emotions deducible from these simple elements. There was absolutely nothing else in that young heart and brain. Yes ! it must decidedly be admitted that *La Beata* was lamentably, wonderfully ignorant.

It was not till she was about sixteen that the neighbours and few acquaintances of the widow Leti began to find their observation

attracted by the appearance of her daughter. It was not even then that any of these observers had the smallest idea that she was beautiful. Form and feature of quite a different mould would have seemed to them absolutely necessary to any such pretension. Yet there was something, which, had they ever given a thought to the matter would have remained inexplicable to them, that did attract their eyes, and did excite emotion of some sort in their breasts, when they allowed them to rest on the girl. What the deuce could it be? She was not like other girls! She was certainly in some way out of the common. Old Beppo Vanni, the artists' colourman, who kept a large shop in the Corso, just opposite the widow's dwelling, seemed to have brought the greatest amount of intelligent meditation to the subject, when he declared that Nina Leti always somehow put him in mind of that Saint Cecilia the foreigners were for ever having copied.

Just about that time the widow Leti's eyesight began to fail her so much, that she was becoming very rapidly incapable of working at her occupation. In vain she sat in the full light of her little window and strained the old eyeballs till they ached in the endeavour to distinguish the delicate shades of colour which her manufacture required. The produce of the painful but futile effort was valueless and unsaleable. In vain, too, did poor Nunziatina strive by increased toil to supply the deficiency in their means which resulted from her mother's incapacity. She had done her utmost before, and could not therefore now succeed in doing more. At last the wolf was at the door in earnest; and the old woman and the young girl looked into the hopeless future with hopeless terror.

It was then that that notion of Nina's likeness to the Saint Cecilia fructified in kindly old Beppo Vanni's mind, as he sat one evening at his own door, "taking the freshness," as the Tuscans say, and medi-

tating what could be done for that poor widow Leti and her daughter. If the girl was so like many of the faces he had often seen in pictures, was it not possible that she might be the very model a painter might wish? He knew pretty well all the artists more or less; and at all events it would cost nothing to try. He would go over the way and broach the subject to the women at once.

So he did. And mother and daughter listened to his proposal both with blank amazement, the mother with little of hope, and the daughter with much of shrinking terror. But old Vanni talked on, rising gradually into a most absolute authority on all subjects connected with art and artists, as he became aware of the utter ignorance of his hearers. He assured the widow that many most respectable young women of his acquaintance earned a comfortable subsistence by such means. And he pointed out

with most satisfactory clearness to Nina herself, that it was only beauties who were wanted to sit for goddesses and nymphs and all that class of characters, who went, saving their presence, almost naked; that her line of business would evidently be of a very different sort,—merely saints and such-like, who always were draped from the chin to the toes. So at length the rhetoric of the worthy colourman, assisted by the yet more persuasive eloquence of dire necessity, so far prevailed, that he was commissioned to mention the matter to some of the artists who frequented his shop.

The upshot of the negotiation was that Nina was engaged by our friend Tito to sit, or rather kneel, for a picture of a Roman girl praying at a road-shrine of the Madonna for the recovery of her sick lover. That was her first engagement in her new profession. The simple idea was within her comprehension; and the feeling to be ex-

pressed, one, with which she could entirely sympathize. She looked the part to perfection accordingly. The picture made a success, and so did the model. From that time she had no difficulty in finding quite as much occupation in her new business as her strength would enable her to undertake; and that, as old Beppo Vanni had prophesied, without being called on to represent any of that class of personages, which “the beauties,” as the old man said, are required to sit for.

Nina was at that time all but sixteen years old; and it was two years previous to the time when we have found her, too evidently at home, in Pippo Lonari’s studio.

She very soon became well known and an universal favourite in the artist world, which her new vocation obliged her to frequent. It was a world, as will be readily understood, far more able to appreciate her peculiar beauty, than that which had alone seen her

previously. And just about that period her pure, unearthly, saintly beauty grew and increased, and became day by day more wonderful. The too slender figure gained but little in development. But a deeper expression came into those strange sad eyes; and the slightest possible tint of rose-colour was added to the pale cheek. There could be little doubt that the new model was beautiful, though she was still as little adapted as ever to sit for that class of female subjects, for which, according to the dictum of old Beppo Vanni, "the beauties" were required. For a different class of subjects she was soon pronounced by the Florentine artist world to be invaluable. It was then that she received from these new patrons the *sobriquet* of La Beata. It was one of those nicknames, which, from their evident and striking fitness, at once thrust into oblivion the names whose place they take, and adhere thenceforward indelibly to the

persons so happily designated by them. *La Beata* was very soon wholly unknown by any other appellation.

And what about the result of all this unprotected companionship, and familiar acquaintance with the artist world of Florence on the moral character and conduct of *La Beata*? How did the innocent and pure-hearted but wholly inexperienced and very ignorant girl steer her course among the manifold dangers of such a manner of life? It may appear at first sight perhaps unintelligible and incredible, but it is nevertheless a certain truth, that the dangers which lay around *La Beata's* path were very much less than they would have been had she been similarly circumstanced in some other cities where a far higher standard of morality is professed, and a stricter rule of conduct enforced; less, it must be understood, as long as the maiden was fancy-free; not so, perhaps, when such should cease to be the

case. Many an offer of heart and hand, unconnected with any allusion to legal or ecclesiastical ratification, may no doubt have reached her ear. But they called no blush of shame to the cheek, awakened no pang of moral indignation in the breast, and were rejected by the heart-whole maiden as simply as the most strictly proper matrimonial proposals might be by ladies living under a different dispensation. And such rejections would have been submitted to, with neither more nor less of rebellion against them, than is wont to be exhibited by aspirant husbands. Snares, cunningly contrived pitfalls, arts of seduction, there would have been none. Nor—most important consideration of all—would any consciousness of being surrounded by an atmosphere of vice have sullied the ignorant purity of her soul. A loveless union, brought about by any kind of consideration or temptation whatever, would have seemed to her imagination simply

impossible, and altogether out of the question ; while the absence of such union when mutual affection existed would have appeared equally unintelligible. So sadly ignorant was *La Beata* ! The non-performance of the marriage rite would have seemed to her mind to entail a social position about as much inferior to that of people married with a low mass, as the latter was inferior to the condition of such as were made man and wife with all the ceremonial of a full choir. But the dangers, the imprudence of such a tie, not only unsanctioned by divine, but unprotected by human law ! Even supposing her poor mind to have been in such a state of heathen darkness as to have been incapable of appreciating the higher considerations of Christian morality, could she have been ignorant, that a tie lawlessly formed to-day might be lawlessly broken to-morrow ? Were there no warning instances of broken vows, if not of broken hearts, of deserted

mothers and nameless children even in the small social environment which made her little world?

In truth such beacons were not wanting. But to the moral feeling as well as in the phraseology of that little world, such sad cases were “disgrazie,” and not “*disgraces*.” “Disgrazia,” a misfortune, a regrettable circumstance arising from the absence of “grazia,” or *favour*, and in no wise implying either want of “grace” in our theological sense of the term, or “disgrace” in the acceptation given to the word by the robust moral sense of a Protestant population, is received by nations taught to expect their well-being from the special protection of favouring saints, as a full and sufficient account and explanation of very much evil of all sorts which people whose teaching has been that conduct makes fate, speak of by a different name. And then La Beata was *not* prudent; had no tincture of that highly-

valued virtue among the simple elements of her singularly incomposite nature. When she might give her heart it was but too certain that it would be given without any prudential considerations respecting future contingencies, which would appear to her as wholly beyond the range of possibility as the wildest reversal of the order of nature. Calculate the chances that love might by lapse of time grow cold! Quite as soon would she have thought of counting how many more years the mighty dome might last, beneath whose shadow she had been born and lived. Both appeared to her equally and necessarily eternal. But those other luckless cases, those *unfavoured* loves, on which the saints had not smiled? Might not that which had happened to others befall her also? Alas! when did youth ever so reason?

So La Beata walked the path of her new life in simple unsuspectingness of evil, uncontaminated at least by any consciousness of the

proximity of sin or shame, and safe, like Una with her lion, as long as she trod it heart-whole and fancy free.

And this safety lasted for more than a year from the time she had first entered on her new profession. It had been found impossible by more than one among the best of those with whom she had been thrown into intimacy, to effect a lodgment in a heart already fully occupied by one great love. During all that time *La Beata* had lived but for her mother. The widow had become entirely dependent upon her exertions and care ; and this changed relationship added a new element to the tender love, which had all the strength of a solitary and life-long passion. Her mother too was evidently declining in strength and health, and before long a painful anxiety was added to the daughter's preoccupation. Under these circumstances her heart had been closed against the approach of strangers, and all her thought throughout the

livelong day was centered on the evening hour, when she should return to the little lonely home in the Corso, learn how her mother had got through her solitary day, enjoy the one pleasure of her life in striving to cheer her, and expending her earnings in little purchases for the increase of the invalid's comfort.

And this lasted, as has been said, for more than a year. Then came a change. Old Francesca Leti reached the termination of her pilgrimage, and went to her rest in the common grave opened for that day's "undistinguished" dead in the bleak dreary cemetery of Trespiano, some three miles up the Apennine on the Bologna road. There is no following of the dead by mourning relatives in that last journey of the Florentine citizen. Death's harvest is each day gathered in an "asylum for the dead," as the dismal place is called—somewhat strangely to our ears;—and at midnight each day in the year, the day's tribute is despatched on

its solitary journey, unaccompanied save by the driver of that truly "omnibus" van. Some two hours later it is received at its destination by the solitary capuchin friar appointed to this dreary duty; the few prescribed prayers are said, or not said, according to the delicacy of his conscience; and the new citizens in that dead Florence are by next day's dawn even less "distinguished," or distinguishable, than they were among the crowd of the living.

And La Beata was alone in the little dwelling, where all her life had passed, during the long hours of that night.

Then came her kind old neighbour, Beppo Vanni the colourman, with such words of comfort, and proffers of service, as he was able to afford. And it was settled between them that La Beata should find a home in his house at all events for the present;—an arrangement proposed by the worthy colourman in a truly friendly spirit, yet possibly

not altogether without a lurking thought that it might be useful to him in his artist connection; for La Beata was already becoming known in the art community as an invaluable model in her own especial line.

So the past year's life was resumed; and La Beata soon found her time so fully occupied, that she had to keep count of the applications for her services, in order that each patron might be duly attended to, as it came to his turn. Beppo Vanni was delighted at so decided a success.

But he could not make his protégée as delighted with it as he felt she ought to be. In truth all seemed changed and void to her; the whole interest and meaning of her life had passed out of it. The one hour of her daily existence, which gave value to the rest, was gone. That return *home* to the little room and its expecting inhabitant each day at "the twenty-four," as the old world Florentine still terms the hour of sunset,

though he has long since left off using that obsolete mode of reckoning the hours in any other case ;—that return, the expectation of which had been the entire interest of the day, came now only to bring with it painfully contrasting memories of the days gone for ever. Life was void and purposeless to La Beata, because love had died out of it. That great, craving heart was empty ; and the days when she could tread the path of her life in safety were consequently gone. Some being to love ! some creature, something, if better were not, to fill the aching void, to be the recipient of all that abounding wealth of tenderness, which must by fiat of Him who gave it be expended, under penalty of its turning to life-destroying poison if shut up in forced sterility ! some food for the yearning sickening hunger for sympathy !

That was the cry, imperious, refusing to be silenced, of the heaven-ordained needs of

the heart; inarticulate, as are the behests of Nature, addressing themselves, not intelligibly to the understanding, but prompting by uncomprehended solicitings, and enforcing obedience by remorseless infliction of suffering.

So the hour of "danger" in the path had come. And *La Beata* went forth to meet it on her way, unsuspecting, unwarned, with no moral compass-card to guide her, in all the innocence of her boundless ignorance, and no spell against all shapes of evil save the unsullied purity and guileless simplicity of her maiden heart.

CHAPTER III.

DANGER!

OCCASIONS which seem quite special in their precise aptitude to bring about the events afterwards attributed to them, are never wanting, when causes of more wide and general operation have rendered such events inevitable. "There is a fate in these things," as the professors of a short and easy system of philosophy express it with perfect satisfaction to themselves.

It so happened, accordingly, that one of the first engagements La Beata was called on to fulfil after her return to her work, was to sit to our friend Pippo Lonari for an Annunciation. The picture had been ordered by a

well-known dealer, well known to a certain class of artists, and a certain class of purchasers, whom it was the great object of his life to keep from ever becoming acquainted with each other; and the picture is doubtless at this moment the treasured possession of some English or American lover of high art, on whose walls it figures as a fine and undoubted specimen of this or the other "quattrocentista" master, whose life and style have been carefully got up from Vasari by the fortunate purchaser, since he had "the luck to pick it up." The picture would not be a disgrace to any purchaser's wall, did it appear there as the work of an obscure artist, one Filippo Lonari. But that name, at all events, it is very certain was not the one applied to it.

La Beata sat for both the figures, the angel announcing the wondrous tidings, and the submissive "handmaid of the Lord" who receives them. And admirably had she

conceived and presented the spiritual meaning and fit expression of either figure. The picture was a success; not, it will of course be understood for the artist who had painted it, and still less for the unknown model who had contributed so much to its merit, but to the dealer who sold it;—a success, which was so far reflected on the former, as that it made the dealer willing to tempt the painter's honesty by fresh commissions of the same discreditable sort.

The twofold sitting for this picture had of course been a long affair, occasioning much continued intercourse between the painter and his invaluable model. The quickness and genuinely poetical feeling with which she had entered into and succeeded in expressing the sentiment required in the picture, had had the effect of promoting the mere model almost to the position of an adviser. Plans of new pictures had been discussed between them; and the artist had

been led to appreciate at their true value the latent æsthetic capabilities of his model, and the important services which she might render him. And there was a charm for La Beata in this intercourse, which it is not difficult to understand. For the first time in her life, appeal had been made to the higher capacities of her nature. They had been called into activity by the only means which the utterly uncultivated state of her intelligence left possible, by an appeal to the poetry of the heart. The apparently arid rock had been smitten, and the waters of a true poetic temperament had gushed forth in abundance. The mere fact, too, of the creation of a new interest in the void of her life, of a something for thought to rest on outside the weary round within which it had since the death of her mother been confined, was a source of unrecognized but very pleasurable relief to the intolerable emptiness of the weary days.

Easy to understand that all this must have been pleasant! Equally evident, alas! that prudence would have classified such pleasures as “doubly hazardous!” If only the Pygmalion to whose lot it fell to animate the lovely statue had been somewhat worthier of the fortune, than poor Pippo Lonari!

Then, just as the intercourse which had arisen in the manner described was growing into intimacy, another incident occurred with the “fatality” usual in such cases, of a nature to render the escape of the limed bird well-nigh impossible. Pippo had been living ever since he commenced his career as an artist with an only sister. Her constant presence in the studio had no doubt facilitated the terms of easy familiar intercourse on which La Beata had fallen into the habit of visiting it. Almost immediately after the completion of the picture of the Annunciation, Assunta Lonari was taken ill. What was to be done in the narrow little lodging

consisting of just two rooms then occupied by the artist and his sister? Nothing can be conceived more helpless than a man in such a position. If the male member of a household so constituted falls ill, his companion, be she sister, or wife, or mother, tends him as a matter of course. But neither brother, husband, nor son can transform himself into the “ministering angel” required by the needs of a sick chamber. If sickness like other ills came into the world by woman’s fault, that at least, as well indeed as most of the others, is rendered tolerable only by her tending and sympathy.

Of course the nursing of Assunta Lonari fell to the lot of La Beata. She never made formal offer of her services to Pippo on the occasion; nor did he either ask for, or specially accept them. It seemed to all parties a matter of course. She was “neighbour” to the sick woman; and in devoting to her nights and days of watching and attendance,

did under the circumstances no more after all than almost any one of her station, country, and sex would have done.

But here was another element of "danger" in the path. Here was a community of alternating hopes and fears, and petty cares. Here was daily, nightly, almost hourly isolated companionship during the short but constantly recurring minutes of anxious consultation, of necessary refreshment, of mutual consolation and encouragement. But greater danger was yet behind. The end came at last. Assunta Lonari died. And she, too, was within twelve hours on her silent though not solitary journey to Trespiano.

Then it seemed to the man and woman left face to face within the narrow walls of that small dwelling, as if a vast solitude had suddenly been made around them. Suddenly, that which had stood between them as it were a veil, mitigating the sense of absolute face to face presence and spiritual

contact, was removed by the removal of the dead. Even as the smallest parapet on the edge of a precipice makes all the difference to the imagination of one who walks its brink, so to the two left together in that room the withdrawal of that third, though but a dying woman scarcely conscious of their presence, nay, though but the dead form from which the spirit had fled, made a difference in their position, which each felt to be wonderful, inexplicable. It seemed as if the magnetic currents of sympathy, the hidden influences of soul on soul, the mysterious speaking of eye to eye, had hitherto passed through an interrupting medium, which had modified, mitigated, and deadened the violence of their meeting; whereas now they met full and direct, with a result like that of an electric shock, startling to both of them, and shaking the weaker to the very centre of her being. They stood before each other in the great void around them,

even as the first pair stood in the solitude of the new-made world ; and as in Eden, so in that mean chamber, the relationship in which alone it appeared possible that they must thenceforth stand towards each other revealed itself to them.

Then words had to be spoken, tears to be shed and dried, consolations to be given, out-looks towards the future, to which youth so instinctively turns from past sorrow, to be shared ; then hands to be clasped, and vows to be exchanged—and a “ fatality ” to be accomplished.

The Church, too, did her part, not, alas ! at the altar, but in the confessional. The old *curato*, to whose little heeding ear the simple diary of La Beata's life had been duly from time to time communicated for many a year, on receiving the graver continuation of his penitent's life-narrative, seriously urged on her the duty of persuading her lover to regularize their union, pointing

out that the Church's dues were not so heavy as to be prohibitory. He also enjoined recitations of penitential psalms and rosaries. But on rising from the seat of his spiritual office he smoothed, as of yore, with his venerable hand the braids of her hair as he bade God bless her. And the psalms were duly repeated, and the rosaries punctually said, all paid with the scrupulous honesty of a conscientious debtor; and as to the advisability of investing money in purchasing in more formal shape that blessing, which her old confessor had already given her, in the manner which he had advised, why that was a matter which Pippo understood best. Whatever he did was surely right—Pippo knew.

And the gossips of the neighbourhood said to each other, “*La Nina ha preso Pippo Lonari il pittore per damo, sai.*”

“*Speriamo che la menera a buon fine, poveretta!*”

“Nina, you know, has taken up with Pippo the painter for her sweetheart.”

“Poor little thing, let’s hope it will turn out well.”

And that was all.

Charitable English reader, to whom much has assuredly been given, remember that it is from such that much will be expected; and weigh not with your well regulated balance the errors of a sister, whose innocence and guilt, and knowledge of either of them were about upon a par with those of Yarico the poor Indian girl in the ballad.

CHAPTER IV.

TITO'S IDEA.

“NEVER mind what the Church says! I would far rather hear what La Beata thinks about the matter,” said Tito Fanetti. The matter, it will be remembered, was that question of the degree in which an artist is guilty of dishonesty, who accepts commissions to paint imitations of ancient pictures, to be sold to deceived purchasers as the productions of other hands. This was the industry by which Pippo Lonari had supported himself and La Beata since the day described at the end of the last chapter, a department of art requiring talent of really

no inconsiderable kind, but miserably paid, as is always all work which dare not avow and show itself in the broad light of day. It must be added that, in a very secondary degree, the accusation of aiding and abetting a dishonest traffic might also be brought against La Beata ; for her share in the production of these mock ancient pictures had been no unimportant one. The expression, sentiments, and feeling of those devout pre-Raffaellite painters of the "ages of faith" would hardly have been imitated so successfully by our friend Pippo without the aid of such a model. Hardly would it have been possible to find a second so admirably adapted for the purpose by speciality of form and feature, no less than by the genuine child-like purity and simplicity of heart, which informed those features with an expression unassumable by art, and by the quick sensibilities of a truly poetic idiosyncrasy, which enabled her to seize and assi-

milate the idea intended to be represented. Clearly, La Beata was an accomplice in the production of forged Crivellis, Beato Angelicos, and Botticellis. What had she to say on the subject in answer to Tito Fanetti's uncompromising morality?

“Certainly, ’*gnor** Tito,” she said, raising her large brown eyes from her knitting, and throwing* back the long silken fringe above them till it touched the delicate brow above; “certainly Pippo knows better than I; and what you say about not minding what the Church says cannot be right in any way. It is true,” she added, after a pause, “that I should not like any one to ask Pippo if he had painted such a picture, and that he should be obliged to say No when it was really his work. But Pippo knows best,” she added, ever swinging round her sheet-anchor of confidence and faith.

“Brava, La Beata!” cried Tito, “that is

* Florentine cockney for Signor Tito.

just it. Can it be well, Pippo, to put yourself in a position which may compel you to a falsehood, and that falsehood the denial of your own work?"

"Oh, yes! brava La Beata! bravo Tito! bravi one and all," grumbled Pippo, a little irritated. "It is all very fine, but one must live—not to mention *two*," he added, unconsciously allowing in his crossness just a little tip of the cloven hoof to become visible; "and I am sure I don't see how that is to be managed except by accepting old Mattei's work."

"Would your excellency condescend," said Tito, with a slight intonation of satire in his voice, "to make an honest copy, call it a copy, and sell it as a copy, I should like to know?"

"What's the good of talking in that way," rejoined Pippo, testily, "when you know I could not sell the copy when made—at this time of year, too, when there is not a blessed

stranger in all Florence. Of course I'd copy, and be thankful, too, if I could get a chance."

"Well," said Tito, "the fact is I have an idea."

"You don't mean it," interrupted the other; "poor Tito! What will become of the good dinners and the regular work? What business has a copyist with an idea? It will be the ruin of you; strangle it at once, my Tito, before it begets a brood of others. They increase and multiply, the pernicious things! You don't know what it is to have one idea; you don't know the danger of it. Once consent to nourish it, and foster it, and it will soon turn you from a comfortable, regular-working copyist, eating excellent dinners, and lecturing on the dignity of the profession, into—into as poor a devil as myself," he concluded, throwing up his handsome head, and passing his fingers through his long black hair, with an

air and attitude meant to express the sublime martyrdom of a genius too exalted to earn the wages of a plodder by plodding work. The tirade, however, was only one part coxcombical to three parts satirical. It was an opportunity for a little bit of revenge on Tito for his lecturing, and for working off the ill humour which it had generated. It was, nevertheless, true that Pippo *was* the cleverer man of the two, and *had* more of original talent and spontaneity than his steady-going and well-to-do friend. But Tito had not only abundant good sense, and sufficient self-knowledge to be quite aware that this was the case, but also an inexhaustible stock of that good humour which arises from being well contented with oneself and with the world around one.

“True! my poor Pippo!” he rejoined, in the same tone; “true every word of it, my hapless Michael Angelo under a wet blanket! Heaven forbid that I should change my

journeyman's work, fat capons and Chianti, for ideas, dry crusts, and cold sausage! I was about to rid myself of my idea by offering it to you. One more or less will make no difference to you, who are eaten out of house and home by legions of them. My idea is simply this. I know of a commission for a certain copy, for which a handsome price would be paid; and I think I see how you may get the job."

"But why do you not take it yourself?" said Pippo, feeling a little ashamed of his ill humour, as Tito's friendly intentions became evident.

"Because I can't execute it," said Tito, quietly.

"And you think I can?" said Pippo, perfectly restored to his complacency by the apparent compliment.

"Yes!" continued Tito, "I think perhaps you can; if *La Beata* will lend her help."

Again the large inquiring brown eyes

looked up, while the long, delicate fingers continued their work as rapidly and uninterruptedly as before.

“What the deuce,” cried Pippo, “can La Beata have to do with it, if it is to be a copy?”

“Why the case is this,” answered Tito. “An English *milordo* left a commission last winter with my brother-in-law for a copy of the Madonna del Cardellino. But it must be a copy from the original.”

“And how does the Englishman mean to get it?” rejoined Pippo. “Does he know that every turn for a copy of the Cardellino is bespoken for years to come; and that the man who is now copying it, whoever he may be, must have put his name down on the list something like ten years ago? Ridiculous, isn’t it, that these foreigners will have endless copies of a certain half-dozen or so of pictures? so that while the rest of the gallery is nearly empty, it is impossible

to get place for an easel before one of the favourites without waiting years for your turn. If I ever have a son I shall put his name down for all the crack pictures the same day he is baptized."

"If the Englishman does not know all that, my brother-in-law knows it well enough. And he knows that an original copy of the Cardellino must be paid for," said Tito.

"But how on earth am I, of all men in Florence, to make such a copy?" returned the other; "and, above all, what in the world has *La Beata* there to do with it? Do explain your riddle at once!"

"I should have explained it by this time, if you would have a minute's patience, and hear me out," said Tito. "This is my plan. The next now on the list at the gallery for copying the Cardellino is old Francesco Borsoli. Now if you could induce him to give up his turn to you?"

"Bah! a very promising scheme truly!

to me too! Why he would as soon think of—”

“But you won’t hear! do listen. You remember when there was to be a new vice-president at the academy last year how furious old Borsoli was because he was passed over. He made sure he was to have the appointment. Well, he has been furious ever since; and he means to take a revenge which is to crush all his enemies to powder. He is going to paint a picture, which shall at the same time be a proof of the injustice done him and its punishment. It is to represent Astræa leaving this earth, and especially the city of Florence, for ever. Sundry portraits are to be introduced, damned to an immortality of pillory, in the lower part of the canvas. But the Goddess of Justice was to have been La Beata. Now you see it?”

It must be explained, that La Beata, from the day on which she had given herself to

Pippo, had declined all engagements to sit as a model to any other artist. Some undefined sentiment, some newly-awakened timidity had from that time forth made the occupation, which had previously been indifferent, insuperably distasteful to her. The only one point on which she had uttered any word to Pippo respecting the arrangement and conditions of the life they were thenceforth to lead in common, was a gentle suggestion that she should for the future sit only to him. And to this he had readily agreed, partly because the time had not yet come when he would have opposed any wish of hers, and partly because it seemed to him no small advantage to be the monopolist of so valuable a model. So there was a three days' outcry of vexation and disappointment among the Florentine artistic community. This, that, and another picture, for which the sitting of *La Beata* had been counted on, were, their

designers declared, henceforward not capable of execution.

Loudest and most despairing among these complainants was the disappointed candidate for the vice-presidency of the Academy. What was to become of that picture on which he had set his heart? What was to become of his anticipated vengeance? Where was he to look for an Astræa who should in any way embody his conception? Was injustice always to triumph and come off scot-free? He was half inclined to believe that La Beata's retirement from the profession of a model had been schemed by his enemies for the sole purpose of frustrating the righteous retribution with which he was preparing to overwhelm them.

Now you see it! as Tito said. Now it became apparent to Pippo and La Beata, as well as to the reader, how her assistance was necessary to Tito's plan. The irate old painter was to be induced to cede to Pippo

Lonari his turn of the privilege of copying the celebrated Madonna del Cardellino in the Tribune at the gallery of the Uffizi, on condition that La Beata should sit for Astræa in the act of abandoning the world for good and all, in his picture.

“And now what do you think of my idea?” cried Tito. “You see, when regular-going comfortably-fed fellows like me *do* have ideas, they are apt to be of a practical and less dangerous sort than those you were warning me against. I will guarantee that my brother-in-law will be glad enough to give you the commission, if you can contrive to get the means of making the copy. And really I don’t see any other chance of his getting an original copy for his purchaser. What do you say to it?”

“I say the idea is a good one, and say, also, that you are a good fellow. I’ll make the copy, and make a good one, your brother-in-law may depend on it.”

“But what says La Beata?” pursued Tito. “Does she consent to her part in the plot?”

La Beata looked up with a bright, pleased smile on her pale face.

“Of course she does!” said Pippo. “Poor Tina will be only too glad to help me to get such a chance.”

And “Pippo knows,” said poor Tina, using her favourite phrase to express the correctness of his statement, that of course she would do anything he could ask of her.

Tina, it must be understood, was short for Beatina, which was diminutive of Beata. It is impossible that an Italian girl's name should not by some process be brought to some such pleasant sounding and easily spoken pet appellation. A similar process to that which had made Annunziata into Nina, now made Beata, itself a nickname, but too formal and stately a one for the every-day use of domestic intercourse, into

Tina. It was already "of course" with Pippo, that "poor Tina" should make no opposition to his slightest behest.

"So now it only remains," said Tito, "to open the negotiations with Borsoli. And that I will undertake. I shall in all probability see him to night at the café. What are you others going to do this evening?"

"Oh!" said Pippo, "we thought of going to the Goldoni to see a new farce they have brought out there. They say one gets a lira's worth of laughing for one's half-paul."

The poor couple, it will be observed, who had dined on a crust and a sausage, could nevertheless find the means of indulging in the theatre, at least on Sunday evening. But this was only after the ordinary usage of Florentine life; according to which, it has been said, the requirements of humanity, ranged in order of their necessity, would stand thus: 1st, a somewhat more than decent dress for festa-days; 2nd, the theatre;

and 3rd, daily bread. The half-paul, for which the second of these necessities can be enjoyed, represents, it is true, only about twopence-halfpenny of our money. But that even this sum should be expended on it by many who are absolutely short of daily food, as is the case, certainly indicates in a very remarkable degree a preference for intellectual over purely sensual satisfaction, not to be met with among a similar class of any other population.

“Well! I’ll tell you how it shall be then,” said Tito. “After you have brought *La Beata* home from the theatre, you come on and meet me at the café Michael-Angiolo, in the Via Larga. In all probability I shall have seen Borsoli, and will tell you the result.”

So it was settled. And Tito, after having very carefully arranged his hair, beard, and moustache, and settled the set of his hat to his satisfaction before a fragment of mirror

on Pippo's wall, went to exhibit himself in the "Lungarno," where all the *bourgeois* world were by this time taking their evening stroll, and enjoying that cool evening hour, the infinite delight of which can only be appreciated by the dwellers in a southern clime.

It was near midnight before the two artists met at the rendezvous indicated by Tito, in the Via Larga.

Florence is not the gay rake that Venice is—or was, rather, before the life was utterly crushed out of her by her trembling tyrants. Popular manners and modes of life have a wonderfully obstinate vitality in them, not observable about the apex of the social pyramid. And the thrifty old Republic on the banks of the Arno has never learned to imitate the dissipated Queen of the Adriatic, in her inveterate habit of not going home till morning. When the cool night-breeze is rippling the lagoon, and the moon is flooding the piazza of St. Mark with silver light

the small hours are in pleasure-loving Venice the most full of life of any in the twenty-four. But when the bell in Giotto's matchless tower has boomed out midnight over the silent city, sober Florence has gone to bed; or has at least gone home,—“although the girls are pretty, and although the moon shines bright,” as the rakish old song has it.

The Via Larga accordingly was silent and well-nigh deserted when Pippo, having left La Beata at home in the Via dell' Amore, went to his appointment at the café Michael-Angiolo, the favourite resort of the Florentine artist community. The little tables in front of the café standing on the pavement of the public way, and entirely monopolizing the footpath—not in defiance of, but in happy ignorance of street police-law—were almost all deserted; and yawning waiters were preparing to shut up for the night. Tito, however, true to his tryst, was still sitting on the moonlight street in front of the café,

patiently smoking his cigar, and studying the lines of perspective, sharply marked by the black shadows thrown by St. Mark's Church on the white pavement.

"Well," said Pippo, coming up, "what success for the idea?"

"All right!"

"The old fellow accepts then, and gives up his turn in the Tribune, for which he has been waiting for heaven knows how many years?"

"It goes upon wheels, I tell you," returned Tito, using the Tuscan metaphor, equivalent to our more maritime expression, going swimmingly. "The old boy jumped at it. He is as furious as ever. He don't care a straw about the Cardellino, or any other picture on earth, save THE picture, which is to heap confusion on the heads of his enemies."

"It will be a very large composition, by all accounts, if all those he considers such are to be pilloried in it."

“Poor old Borsoli ! I shouldn’t wonder if he were to paint a better picture than he has ever painted yet.”

“Nor I. Indignation may paint pictures as well as make verses perhaps,” said school-bred Pippo.

“If it can,” said Tito, on whom his friend’s bit of classicality was utterly thrown away, “he will do it this time. He is boiling over.”

“When does he want to begin?” asked Pippo.

“Instantly ! *La Beata* will have enough to do to satisfy him. I should have stayed with him all night if I had waited to hear all that is to be expressed in the face of *Astræa*. The mouth is to be eloquent with a whole chapter of invective against charlatans, pretenders, time-servers, and academy-directors of all sorts. One eye is to look up to heaven with despairing sorrow, and the other to flash withering indignation earthwards. The nose, of course, is to be turned up with in-

effable contempt; the toe, as she rises from earth, to overturn the Academy with a parting kick!"

"Poor Tina! And when can I begin at the Cardellino?"

"On Monday. Carlo Fermi is at work there now: his time is up on Saturday. Tomorrow we will go to my brother-in-law and settle the matter. I know you will find the terms good."

"I shall be content, I have no doubt. But how can I ever thank you, my dear fellow?" said Pippo, feeling really very grateful to Tito for his genuine kindness.

"Only by kicking that old rascal Mattei down stairs, when he next comes to bespeak a Giotto or a Gaddo Gaddi. Good night!"

"Good night! I am to call for you at your place to-morrow morning. What hour?"

"Say ten. Good night, *mio caro*!"

CHAPTER V.

MAESTRO BORSOLI'S STUDIO.

IN due course of time both pictures were painted; the copy of the favourite Madonna del Cardellino by Pippo Lonari, and the great expression of retributive justice by old Maestro Borsoli. The first was completed to the entire satisfaction of Signor Tanari the dealer, Tito's brother-in-law, in due time, to be well dry by the arrival of his English customer, who was expected in the Autumn. It was admitted on all hands to be an admirably successful copy.

It may be that Pippo's practice in drawing from the pure outlines and eminently spiritual beauty of La Beata's features had

been a good preparation for the task of reproducing the master-piece of Raffael. At all events his success in doing so was complete. And as the expected customer was rather an important person in the Florence art-market, and well known to be a very competent judge of painting, as well as a liberal purchaser, Signor Tanari was exceedingly well pleased to have been able to execute so satisfactorily a commission, which he had feared he would not be able to execute at all. In short our friend Pippo had made a hit.

Signor Borsoli's picture was also completed entirely to his own satisfaction, if not to the utter defeat and destruction of his enemies. Every morning while the two works were in contemporaneous progress, Pippo, as he went to the gallery, accompanied La Beata to the door of the old painter's studio. And many a laugh they had together over his exigencies, and in-

structions to his model. Nevertheless she contrived to acquit herself on the whole to the old man's satisfaction.

Towards the end of the work they had become very good friends; and La Beata had discovered that irritable vanity and much absurdity were not incompatible with a large amount of kindness, and even of sound good sense on matters unconnected with art and its disappointed ambitions and jealousies. Every day about one o'clock he used to have a little cup of black coffee, and a small roll brought him from a neighbouring café; and then there was half an hour's rest for the model as well as for the painter. And La Beata, deposed from acting goddess on her platform, used to subside into a very meek and modest little mortal, and pull out her knitting-needles to put the vacant time to profit as she sat on the corner of her stage. But after three or four days, two little brass porringers, and two little coffee-cups, and

two tiny measures full of powdered sugar, appeared on the little oval brass tray from the coffee-house.

“I hoped, *mia cara*,” said the old painter, with as stately a courtesy as a master of ceremonies might have used to a duchess, “that you would do me the favour of saving me the discomfort of taking my collation alone.”

So thenceforth the half-hour’s repose was passed in a little of that quiet chat, of which Tuscans of every class are so fond ; and for the subject of which, be the parties ever so much strangers to each other, they never seem to be at a loss. Very quickly, however, old Borsoli and La Beata grew to be intimate. And one day on laying down his maulstick, as the regular tap at the door announced the arrival of the boy from the café, the old man said as he poured out his portion, and handed the other miniature little bright brass coffee-pot to his guest, “ Well,

Beatina mia, and how do you and Pippo get on together?"

It was the first time he had ever made any allusion to her position in her home, or to any part of her affairs unconnected with the business of the painting-room. The question would have been an offensive one from any, save the most intimate friend, of her own or nearly her own time of life; but was perhaps permissible from one old enough to be her grandfather. Nor was there any feeling at La Beata's heart (poor ignorant little Yarico that she was), which made the question seem more embarrassing to her, than it might have appeared to any bride of less than a year old standing. Still there was a startled expression in her eyes, as they looked up in answer, and a slight increase of rose-colour in her pale cheeks. And it was probably in obedience to these hints, that he was treading on tender ground, that he added before she had time to reply:

“I should think the studio under the roof there, must be hotter than can be pleasant, when the *cicale* are singing. But that is over now for this year.”

The subject was thus skilfully brought back within the limits of easy and indifferent gossip; and La Beata was able to answer—

“Yes! one was not cool up there in July and August. The nights were hot. But what would you have? We are poor folks, ’gnor Cecco;* and can’t pay much rent. And the air is so fresh; and the light is so good for Pippo.”

“Ay! has he been painting anything at home lately?”

“No! He is hard at work on his copy at the Gallery.”

“Ah! and a capital copy, I am told, he is making of it. Friend Pippo knows what a picture is, which is more than can be said

* Tuscan for Signor Francesco.

of most of his seniors. Pippo Lonari will make his way yet! Say an old man told you so."

"Do you think so, really?" cried little Tina, looking up with an amount of pleasure sparkling in her eyes which rarely visited them. "*Davvero, davvero*,—truly, truly," she added, "there is nobody whom I would rather hear say as much." And it was, truly, truly; for the old artist's pretentious talk on all art matters, during the hours La Beata had spent in his studio, had been accepted by her at the full value of its author, and joined to his kindness, had impressed her with a very high estimate of her employer's artistic merits.

"Yes," continued the old man musingly, looking with kindly interest at her innocent face, beautified by the excitement of her gratification, "yes, Pippo will make his way. And when he has made it, or is beginning to make it, he won't be content to live in a

garret under the tiles with a little saint-faced Beatina for model, cook, housemaid, and—all."

The kindly old man was sorely puzzled how to come to what he was earnestly minded to say to the simple-hearted child, who was still looking up into his face unsuspiciously, delighted with his prognostications of Pippo's future fortunes. He thought, when he began, that it would be very easy to say the few words of grave advice, not censure, which he was anxious to impress on her, as to the desirability of making her union with Pippo what it ought to be, before any change in the young painter's position might make it less easy to accomplish such a step. But he found his benevolent purpose unexpectedly difficult in the execution of it. There was a purity of heart shining out of those mild honest eyes, that were looking up into his, a guileless innocence in her utter unconsciousness of the evils and

dangers of her position, which made him shrink from uttering the plain words that should destroy all this, as a soft-hearted surgeon might shrink from striking the knife into the delicate limb of a gentle child. So he cast about for some indirect mode of approaching the subject, some ambiguous insinuation, which, without too abruptly rending the veil of innocence-preserving illusion, might gradually awaken her mind to the considerations he wished to place before it. But the old painter was bad at such subtleties of language, and *La Beata* lent him no assistance. He was foiled by the utter absence of flaw in the perfection of her trustfulness.

“Ah, yes!” said she in reply to his first attempt, “that one understands; those who earn can spend. If we grow to be ladies and gentlemen, we must say good-bye to the dear old studio under the tiles.”

“To be sure, to be sure!” said he; “la-

dies and gentlemen! husbands and wives, and comfortable family homes! That is the happy life to look forward to!"

There! thought the old man, I have done it now! the insinuation seemed too broad, as soon as it had passed his lips; and he glanced sharply at his companion under his eyebrows to see the effect it would produce on her. But no result of the somewhat clumsily fired point-blank shot was to be traced on the fortress he was attacking.

She was so stupidly slow-witted, was La Beata!

Good old Borsoli was a bachelor. And the fact was, that La Beata's quick sympathy was representing to her the contrast between the old man's solitary home, and the happier position of Pippo and herself, to which she fancied he was regretfully alluding.

"It is so, indeed, to my mind," said she; "but, dear sir, many are very happy, who have never married."

Now, thought he, the course is clear. To think that the little puss should defend herself so coolly.

"Perhaps they may be," he returned gravely; "but, my dear Tina, the world is harder to women than to men in this matter. For them, at all events, a union not sanctioned in the regular way by the Church, very rarely, if ever, leads to a happy life; far more often it leads to infinite misery."

Now at last she understood him. But his words produced no shock of the kind he had anticipated.

"Do you think, Signor Cecco," she asked with calmly inquiring eyes, "that the ring and the blessing at church can be of so much importance? I know there can be no happiness without the Church's blessing. But I had that at confession from dear old father Benedetto. And I know, that the Church dues ought to be paid. But Pippo will do that, when he thinks it best; and I have

said all the *aves* father Benedetto gave me as a penance for not going to church to be married."

The worthy old painter found that he had embarked in a larger business than he had bargained for. He had intended to say a few words of warning to a thoughtless girl of principles lax enough to live in defiance of the laws of decency and morality. And now he seemed to be called upon to improvise a treatise beginning *ab ovo*, on the sanctity and necessity to society of the marriage tie. Feeling, however, somewhat unprepared to undertake this on the spur of the moment, he preferred confining himself in his reply to the simpler and purely prudential part of the considerations involved in the subject.

"But, my dear child," he said, "one of the reasons why it is so very necessary to be married properly at church is that then it cannot be undone again. *Now*, if Pippo

chose to leave you, he might do so any day ; and what would you be ? neither maid, nor wife, nor widow, you know."

Here the shot told. But, as it was in a manner, and at a point in the conversation quite unexpected by the old painter, he did not perceive it. Two large tremulous tears gathered silently in the still up-looking eyes, and rolled slowly over the more than usually pallid cheeks. It was not the prospect of a contingency, which her whole heart and soul rejected as impossible beyond all conceivable impossibilities, which moved her ; but simply the utter wretchedness of the idea presented to her imagination—as one may weep at a tragedy, the sorrows of which can by no remotest chance ever fall upon our own heads.

" But, you know, Signor Cecco, that can never happen to Pippo and me," said she after a minute's pause, choking down the emotion which was welling up into her

throat. "That could never, never be. It is impossible. We are bound to each other till one—ay, till *both* shall have been laid at Trespiano. Do you think of me, 'gnor Cecco, that I could . . . Those things may happen to light-hearted loves that begin in a laugh at a *merenda* in the Cascine,* to end in tears in the way you say. No! we may have done wrong to put off paying the church fees, which ought to be paid; but there is no chance of misery from any such cause as that."

"Poor Tina!" had probably never before uttered so many words consecutively. Yet she had not said a tenth part of what was in her heart. She felt as a reproach the supposition that she could have formed a connection not utterly indissoluble; though she would have been much puzzled to reduce

* *Merenda*: luncheon, a picnic meal in the Florentine Hyde Park—the great holiday delight of the Florentine cockneys.

her feelings on the subject to words. The sanctity of the marriage tie, and the true agreement of its behests with the needs, promptings, and aspirations of the best and purest human hearts, could not receive more forcible confirmation or more convincing proof than they were then receiving from the dumb and half-understood suggestions of the heart of that poor sinner against them. Her ignorance left her altogether undismayed in presence of the fatal unobservance of legal and ecclesiastical forms. For they have been provided by society as the only possible means of securing that which La Beata thought in her innocence might be so securely trusted to the heart she deemed a counterpart to her own. But unassisted nature sufficed to tinge her cheek with the hue of shame, at the bare thought, that she could be supposed to have entered on a union not indissoluble by its own intrinsic virtue.

Maestro Borsoli looked up at the sound of the little gasp poor Tina's emotion had caused to escape her, and saw that his words had struck a sensitively vibrating chord, though they had altogether failed to produce the warning effect he had intended. It was necessary to proceed; but he felt that he must use his moral scalpel cautiously and delicately.

"God grant that you and Pippo may be safe from any such evils, my dear child!" said he, replying to her last words. "But there are many reasons why the completion of all that is needful to make you legally man and wife should not be delayed. Pippo, as I was saying, will make his way in the world. He will come very likely to live among a different class of people from his present associates;—people who will . . . perhaps . . . that is . . . who will certainly, my poor Tina, think evil of a wife, who the Church says is no wife. Such a

union will be very inconvenient to him too ; —ay ! very disadvantageous, when his circumstances are so changed. And how would you feel if you knew that his position was injured by your connection with him ?”

La Beata felt *then* very distinctly what her feelings would be, should such a horrible vision be ever realized. She felt that the “connection” between her and Pippo (as good old Borsoli phrased it, most painfully to her, though she would have been at a loss to say why) would then, indeed, be dissoluble, and would surely be dissolved in a manner, which not even that “other class” of people could object to ;—by her own speedy vanishing from the bright face of earth, and finding concealment and oblivion beneath the cold clods of Trespiano. Not for all the world, however, could she translate her feelings into words. But again the choking spasm rose in her throat, and the big clear tears gathered in her eyes, as these

unimagined forms of misery seemed to rise on the horizon of her future like hideous spectres, vague, menacing, and but indistinctly visible.

“What then ought we to do, dear Signor Francesco?” she said; “you have lived longer in the world than we have. What ought we to do?”

“Do! my dear simple child,” said the old painter; “why, just go to church and be married in due form like other people. It will be all right then; and you will have no cause to look forward to the future with dread and misgiving.”

“But if ever a day should come, when I should be—what you say, Signor Francesco,—when I should be—*disadvantageous* to Pip-po!” sobbed poor Tina, clasping her slender hands together, and looking the very picture of a *Madonna adolorata*.

“But, my child, you could not be so, but quite the contrary, if you were his legal

wife," insisted worthy Signor Borsoli. "All his best friends would delight to see him married to such a one as you. But this paying of the church-dues, which you seem to think so little of, is absolutely necessary ; and no saying of penitential psalms and counting of rosaries, you little simpleton, can in any way make up for it. You must tell Pippo this. You must make him understand that you cannot consent to your marriage being any longer deferred."

The idea of Tina not consenting to aught that Pippo chose to ordain ! The preposterous absurdity of such a notion struck her so forcibly, that a doubt occurred to her, whether perhaps, after all, good old Signor Borsoli might not be talking of matters he knew very little about. Had he really understood all these things, could he have contemplated the possibility of her not consenting "to do as Pippo might wish and advise ? She contented herself, therefore,

with recurring to her favourite formula ; “Pippo knows best,” she said. The vast extent of his knowledge, as compared to her own extreme ignorance, had probably counted for much among the attractions which had given him so complete an ascendancy over her heart, and had added to love the element of reverence and unbounded trust. Poor little Yarico ! It needed small experience of womanhood to foresee, that the day which should force on her the perception of the clay substratum of her golden idol, would, in making worship no longer possible, break also the heart to which it was so necessary an emotion. ✽

“Pippo knows best,” she said. “He will do about what you say, ’gnor Cecco, whatever ought to be done.”

“Pippo knows !” returned the old artist, with some little irritation in his manner ; “yes, no doubt Signor Pippo knows very well. He knows the truth of all I have

been saying ; and he ought not, therefore, to have placed you in the position you now occupy. Oh yes ! Pippo knows well enough !”

There was more than enough in these few words to undo all the good that the well-meaning old man had accomplished by his attempt to open the eyes of La Beata to the real nature of her position. It was insinuated that Pippo had acted wrongly ; and wrongly towards her too ! To La Beata this sounded like flat blasphemy. The god of her idolatry was attacked. He who could so speak was a heretic, ignorant of the true faith ; and as such, could not be trusted or believed,—on that sacred subject at all events. So she replied, not with any feeling of hostility, for her gentle nature had not in it self-assertion and force of opposition sufficient for that ; but in a tone that expressed her entire persuasion of her interlocutor’s total outer-court ignorance of the blessed mysteries of that home sanctuary he had presumed to criticise.

“Yes ! Pippo knows best,” she said, “and will certainly do whatever is best.”

“Heaven send he may, my poor little Tina ! At all events, you will speak to him of what we have been talking of?”

“Oh, yes ! I will tell him,” returned she, with a little smile of compassionate superiority at the pitiable ignorance on all such subjects of the old bachelor, who could imagine it possible that such a conversation could take place and not be shared by her, at the earliest opportunity, with him who was the partner in all her thoughts, joys, and sorrows.

“And now, little one, we will just retouch that floating bit of hair behind ; and then I think we may bring our sittings to an end.”

So Astræa mounted to her platform ; and Signor Borsoli worked away at his canvas till dusk.

At that time Pippo was wont every evening

to call for her, as he came from his work at the Gallery.

“How has the work gone to-day, *amor mio?*” she said, hanging herself on to his arm, and looking up into his face with loving eyes. “I suppose another day or two will finish it?”

“It is finished, I may say,” replied Pippo; “there are one or two touches I left for the prime of the light to-morrow morning. Tito Fanetti was there with Tanari to-day. They were astonished! It is not every copy, though I say it, that can stand examination with the original by the side of it. Tanari is delighted with his bargain; and, to say the truth, well he may be. I suppose your job with old Borsoli is nearly at an end too?”

“Quite at an end. The picture is almost finished; and he will not want me any more. We said our good-byes this evening.”

“Best so! I shall take something in hand

now to work on at home ; something I shall want you for."

"What a pleasure to be together again all day at home ! Yes, I am glad the *Astræa* is finished."

"What sort of an animal did you find the old fellow on the whole ? He must be a queer fish, I should think."

"Well, I don't know. There never was a word spoken as long as the work went on ; only while we were at luncheon. I told you, you know, of his offering me a cup of coffee when he took his of a day. Every day there was my cup on the tray, when his came in. That was certainly very good-natured. Then we used to talk for half an hour while we rested."

"What did the old fellow find to talk to you about, I wonder ?"

"Oh ! about paintings and painters. He belittles almost every one's pictures. He has a high opinion of you, though, I can tell

you. For all that, I should have liked him better, if we had parted before the talk we had over our coffee to-day."

"Why, you don't mean that he said anything to offend you? The old wretch! I swear by all the saints in the calendar, if he did—"

"No! Pippo; he is not an old wretch, poor Signor Cecco! But he did say what offended me to-day."

"Why, what the devil did he say then? Come, out with it."

La Beata hesitated a little. It had seemed to her, in Signor Borsoli's studio that morning, quite a matter of course to tell Pippo all that had passed between her and the old painter. And now she had not the slightest idea of not doing so. Yet, for some reason or other, she felt a difficulty in speaking on the subject. She would have been utterly at a loss to explain the fact to herself; but so it was, that she was conscious of an em-

barrassment in entering on her story, which she had never felt in speaking to Pippo before. She was vexed at feeling thus, and almost alarmed at the new phenomenon ; as if the words which the old painter had spoken had already operated, like an evil spell, to raise a something between her and Pippo, which had never existed heretofore. And it was with some degree of irritation against Signor Borsoli, as the cause of this uncomfortable sensation, that she replied :

“Why, he began talking about you and your copy of the Cardellino, what a good picture it was ; and then about me . . . about us . . . and then . . . I don’t know how he brought it round to that . . . he began saying that it was very bad that we should not have been married at church.”

“Oh ! he began about that, did he ?” interjected Pippo in no pleasant tone.

“Yes ! and I did not so much mind about that, though he did say, that all sorts of

sorrow and misery would come by not paying the church the lawful marriage perquisites ; for, as I told him, I was quite sure, you knew best”

• “I should think so, indeed!” again interrupted Pippo.

“But then he said, yes, that you knew well enough ; and that it was wrong of you to . . . to have me with you otherwise,” faltered she, drawing herself up closer to his side, and looking wistfully up into his face ; “and that made me angry,” she continued.

“I should think it did too!” growled Pippo ; “angry ! why didn’t you tell the old fool to mind his own business ? an impertinent, hypocritical, meddling old mischief-maker ! I’ll teach him to put his spoon into other folks’ porridge !”

“I did tell him, Pippo, that it was quite certain you would do whatever was most right,” pleaded poor Tina, who was surprised at the amount of anger he appeared to feel

on the occasion; and who felt as if she too were visited by some portion of it.

“Of course I shall!” said Pippo, still angrily. “I know my own affairs best. I know what can be done, and what can’t be done. Have you ever found, Tina, that I have been unmindful or careless in doing all I could for you . . . everything that circumstances would permit? Have I not done my best to make you happy?”

An accurate and true estimate of the balance of good offices and advantages rendered and received by the parties might have stood somewhat thus.

For the consideration of the entire being,—body, heart, and soul,—together with uncounted and uncountable treasures of inestimable love and boundless confidence made over in fee simple, unreservedly, irrevocably, and indefeasibly by the weaker to the stronger vessel, including the ungrudging payment of suit and service in every what-

soever need, requirement, and exigence of the latter, it is agreed, that shelter and such modicum of sustenance as may consist with the convenience and previously supplied necessities of the stronger vessel shall be provided for the weaker during the good pleasure of the stronger. It is nevertheless understood that no withdrawal of such shelter and sustenance shall in any wise enable or authorize the former party to withdraw, suspend, or determine the above recited redevances of undying love, and perfect belief, trust, and confidence.

It may be that this kind of contract, which somehow does not read pleasantly, has for that reason never been reduced to this plain form. But it is nevertheless a very, very common one; well known to all social systems in every age and every clime; and the terms of it are always the same.

This would have been, alas! the accurate statement of the relationship between Pippo

and La Beata. . But the makers of such contracts are not wont to consider the provisions of them accurately,—not even the comparatively prudent and calculating party, who gives so little to receive so much ; and far less she who is giving away her all.

So La Beata made answer to her lord's queries respecting his performance of the conditions due from him, by a look up into his face eloquent with overflowing tenderness.

“Ever and always, my own beloved, my best treasure!” she said ; “always you have striven to make me happy ; and very, very happy have you made me, Pippo,—me who never knew happiness till I knew you !”

La Beata was duly performing her part of the bargain. They almost always do,—those weaker vessels !

“Well then,” rejoined Pippo, as they reached the door of the house in the *Via dell' Amore*, and began to mount the long ascent

to their home, "do not let us suffer mischief-makers to interfere to spoil our happiness. Be assured that I shall act for the best; and let me hear no more of the opinions of other people on the subject."

"No, Pippo! never!" said poor Tina, submissively. "But you are not displeased with me, my own best love?" she added. For there was a something in his manner, which grated painfully in her mind, although she could not explain to herself clearly what it was.

"Displeased! No, Tina mia! Not with you, at least. Come, let us get in."

He put his arm round her waist, and stooped to kiss her on the forehead, as they entered their home. And La Beata tried to think she was comforted. But she felt as if the talk of the old painter was already bearing evil fruit. There was a kind of vague shadow, unintelligible to her, which seemed to have sprung up like an unwholesome ex-

halation from some evil thought, and to spread itself as a separating veil between her and Pippo. What difference could there be between his thoughts and feelings and hers on all these matters? None assuredly, La Beata said to herself.

But the dim veil would stand between her heart and his; and the consciousness of its presence made her ill at ease.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PATRINGHAMS.

ABOUT a month after the date of the conversation recounted in the last chapter, the autumnal weather in Florence was beginning to have more of winter than of summer in its composition. The season of emptiness, vacancy, and summer idleness was coming to an end ; and Florence was expecting her usual immigration of winter guests. Striking is the change the physiognomy of the fair city undergoes at this period of the year ! And to the taste of those who love her more unsophisticated native graces, the local colouring of her genuine Italian life, and the unstarched ease of her own undis-

guised character, the change is not wholly for the better. The difference is like that between the charming woman in the easy, confidential intercourse of her *déshabille* in the boudoir, and the same lady armed cap-à-pié for conquest, chaperonship, or other weighty duty in the full-dressed arena of the ball-room. But the lazy, out-of-doors, *laisser-aller* southern summer life must come to an end. The annual flight of strangers are at the city gates, and Florence must gird up her loins to the serious business of making her livelihood out of them.

So the lodging-houses are spruced up and painted; the shops get in their stocks of goods from London and Paris; the hotels put themselves on full war establishment; the artists give the last touches to the works they have been engaged on; and the picture-dealers and owners of "galleries" set their wares in order, and strive to meet the coming season with an array of new and special attraction.

From Florence in her summer undress, to Florence in her winter company toilet, the transformation *mutatis mutandis* is not unlike that from Oxford in the long vacation to Oxford in term time. In both cases the change indicates to the most superficial observer that the serious business of the place is about to begin. In both anxious speculations are rife as to the probable fullness of the tide of arrivals on which the activity and prosperity of the place depend.

These anxiously expected and eagerly observed arrivals may be classed in three categories; all valuable, and received with glad welcome, but with an amount of rejoicing proportioned to their fertilizing properties. The lowest class consists of the waifs and strays, rambling young bachelors, strong-minded migratory old maids, or small parties of modest pretensions, who come by the diligences and railways. Next above these are the *vetturino* travellers, families occupying all the four inside and two out-

side places of one of those great heavy carriages, which travel from one end of Italy to the other, making easy daily journeys with the same four hardy long-tailed black roadsters. If the horses be indeed four, and not two or three merely, and if the mountain of luggage secured to the huge platform behind by a chain and screw contrivance capable of squeezing a portmanteau in half, be of a respectable height, arrivals of this class will be received with much ringing of hall bells, and running of waiters and porters, and admission to first-floor rooms at the Hotel Vittoria, the Arno, the Nuova York, or the Gran Brettagna. But the real first-class prize, the arrival which is discussed that same night by the lodging-house owners, and touters of all kinds, is the fine large English family in its own travelling carriage, with papa and son and heir on the box, mamma with abundant daughters inside, and man-servant and maid-servant in the

rumble, all complete. Great is the joy in Florence over the advent of such a prize as this. But still the anxious question has to be asked, "Here for the winter, or going on to Rome?" For the position of fair Florence on the highway to the eternal city is the cause of many a sad slip between the cup and the lip in these matters.

One of the first arrivals in the latter part of the autumn, which followed the events that have been narrated, was of the above described valuable class. The family party in question was not developed to the full proportions attained by the finest specimens of the kind. It consisted only of one elderly gentleman on the box, one middle-aged and one young lady in the carriage, and a couple of servants in the seat behind.

It was very evident, to those familiar with such matters, that the party were not altogether strangers in Florence. The English man-servant directed the postilions in fluent

but most wonderfully constructed and pronounced Italian, which was heard as gravely and understood as perfectly by them, as if it had been some mutually recognized and familiar tongue, to drive, not to any one of the hotels, but to a private house in the *piazza Pitti*. And when the carriage reached its destination it was evident that its occupants were known and expected there. In fact, the only stranger to Florence was the younger lady. Mr. and Mrs. Pattingham had passed the previous winter there; and had returned during the summer to England to bring out with them their daughter, who had just, as the phrase goes, completed her education.

Miss Pattingham—Mary, as her father called her, and Molly, as her lady-mother would, despite all remonstrances, persist in naming her—was one of those persons from whom it is difficult to remove the glance that has chanced to light on them. She

had that complete harmonious beauty of feature, figure, and carriage, which is assuredly more often to be found among the higher classes of our countrywomen, than in any other race, clime, or caste in the world. She possessed in especial perfection that exquisite formation of the extremities, both hands and feet, which is so frequently declared to be the peculiar mark and privilege of high-born beauty. Mr. Pattingham, however, had made his large fortune as a calico-printer; and his worthy wife had been the daughter of a member of the same trade in a much smaller way and humbler position, than her now wealthy husband.

Such were the facts; and as facts will not bend to theories, theories must accommodate themselves, as best they may, to facts. “*Fortes gignuntur fortibus et bonis;*” and pointer pups point as soon as they can stand, no doubt. Spanish grandees also by perfection of high-breeding become attenuated

into imbecility, mental and corporeal. Our lads and lasses, on the other hand, have a chance of intellectual and bodily vigour and beauty, proportioned to their deficiency in "quarterings." And genealogists, if they tell the truth, may assist puzzled physiological theorists to account for the fact, that specimens of every species of personal perfection are to be met with in every social class of our population, by pointing out the thorough mixing of all the currents of Anglo-Saxon blood, occasioned by the vicissitudes of our healthily ebbing-and-flowing social system.

I do not intend to describe Mary Patringham more particularly to the reader, for I fear we shall not see enough of her to make it necessary. He knows what a charming English girl is without being told. But if he is an untravelled Englishman, he may be told, that he might travel the world in vain in search of anything nearly so delight-

ful,—unless perhaps he were to look on the further shore of the Atlantic, where similar causes are actively producing similar results.

Mr. Patringham was very far from having any pretensions to be called a gentleman some forty years ago, when he was beginning active life ; but he was not so far from deserving that appellation, in its best sense, at the time when we make acquaintance with him. Of Mrs. Patringham, worthy good soul, and excellent wife and mother as she was, it is impossible to say as much. Whether it be that the education of the mind and feelings is completed, and becomes indelible at an earlier age in women than in men ; or whether the fact is, that we imperatively demand certain graces and elegances in women, the absence of which we allow to be compounded for in the case of men, by mental cultivation and the dignity of moral worth ; certain it is, that men who have risen notably in the world, are far more

often able to bring their outward appearance into congruity with their changed position, than are the partners of their fortunes.

Mr. Patringham was not only a man of intelligence—without which he would not have made ten thousand a year by printing calico,—but he was a man of very superior intelligence, without which he would not have made himself very fairly fit to associate with the class of society in which the possession of such an income ranged him. He had a strong natural taste and feeling for art; which, studiously applied to the lower branches of it, had contributed much to his success in his business. Later in life, he had made the study of its higher manifestations his occupation and amusement. Retired leisure can hardly get comfortably along without a hobby; and Mr. Patringham had cultivated his favourite pursuit into a hobby, up to his weight, and able to carry him very pleasantly along his easy road.

“Law bless you!” said good Mrs. Patringham, “my husband couldn’t live without picturs. He would go without his dinner any day, Patringham would, to look at a new pictur!”

Now Mr. Patringham was the “milordo Inglese” who had in the preceding spring ordered the copy of the Madonna del Cardellino.

“You may guess, Mary,” said he to his daughter, as the family-party sat at breakfast the next morning, “how I have been looking forward to the pleasure of going through the galleries with you. Here we are in the very capital and head-quarters of art. This day, if you have a real love for art in you, ought to be one of the most memorable of your life. Which shall it be first, the ‘Uffizi,’ or the ‘Pitti?’ There you have it close at hand, opposite your windows. But I think it must be the Uffizi to-day; for I want to have a look at my favourite Cardellino.”

“Ah! that’s the picture that you have ordered to be copied, papa, is not it? I shall like to see that.”

“But I don’t know whether I shall get my copy; Tanari said that he could by no means undertake to get it for me.”

“Fiddle-stick’s end, Mr. Patringham! That’s only to charge the more for it. You find the good English guineas, and I’ll go bail you’ll have your pictur fast enough.”

“Well, my dear, perhaps you will turn out to be right: I am sure I hope so. And I’ll tell you what, Mary, while you put on your things, I’ll just run as far as Tanari’s and see what has been done about it.”

“No! dear papa! I shall be ready in two minutes. Let me go with you to the picture-shop. I am so impatient to see something of the town. Don’t shut me up here till you come back.”

“Well, my dear, run and put your things on, and we will go together. And what will

you do, my love?" added he, turning to his wife.

Mrs. Patringham was a stout, comfortable-looking, round, brown lady. She was always brown; her unvarying toilette consisting of a rich coffee-coloured silk dress in the morning, replaced by one of satin or velvet of the same colour in the evening; with a "front" of little brown curls to match across her forehead, and ribbons *en suite* in her cap.

"Oh! I shall stay at home, Mr. P. There's lots to be done and seen to, before all's straight and comfortable here. But I say, P. my dear, there's one word I want to say about Mary. She is as good a girl, Mr. P., though I say it that shouldn't, and as innocent, for all the great eddication she has had, as innocent as a sucking dove, is Mary Patringham."

"My dear," replied Mr. Patringham, as methodically as if he were answering a correspondent's letter of business, paragraph by

paragraph, "I am sure Mary is a very good girl; and I don't see why you should not say so: I have no belief myself in any incompatibility between innocence and education; and young doves, my love, are not fed after the manner of the mammalia."

"Don't you believe any such thing, Mr. P. Depend on't all God's creatures are fed after the manner of their mamma's, one way or t'other. However, that's neither here nor there. But I'm anxious about Mary."

"Why, what's the matter, my dear?"

"Well, this is what sticks in my throat, Mr. P. Mary is come out here to study art. Now I am not going to say anything against art; it would not become me, you being so keen after it. Art is a very fine thing for them as have the money for it,—and a very genteel thing too: and picturs are very pretty furnitur, if they wouldn't put into them things that everybody knows ain't fit to be seen. I don't half like our Mary going to stare at a lot of picturs and images of men

and women, as naked as the day they were born; and a-going, too, to the shops and places among the people that make such things. Think what sort of folks they must be as have those picturs copied off 'em!"

"To the pure all things are pure, my dear," replied her husband, didactically. "Depend upon it, the contemplation of fine art refines and elevates the mind. And as to people, trust me Mary shall not be brought into contact with anything objectionable. Now then, my dear, let us be off," he added to his daughter, as she returned to the room, ready for her walk; "I am anxious to know whether I am to have my copy or not."

So off went the father and daughter, arm-in-arm, as pleasant-looking, and unmistakably English a couple as ever walked the streets of Florence;—the tall, stout, active figure, rather broad-brimmed hat, grey hair and whiskers, smoothly-shaved chin, light-blue eye, ruddy face, and plain straight-cut

garments of the father, being all as clearly legible certificates of British origin, as the pretty beaver hat, with its white feather, beaming healthy face beneath it, grey velvet-trimmed cloak, scarlet petticoat, exquisitely booted foot, and firm elastic step of the daughter.

England, upon this occasion at least, had no cause to be ashamed of the specimen of her sons and maidens, as the old Lancashire manufacturer and his daughter walked through the streets of Florence, causing most heads to turn as they passed, and occasioning the often-repeated observation—

“New English comers! *Per Bacco! quante ce n'è di belle fra queste Inglesine!*” *

So they went on, turning out of the Piazza Pitti, by the *Sdrucchiolo* † *de' Pitti*, and so up

* “How many beauties there are among these English girls!”

† Literally, *the slippery path leading to the Pitti*. It is a narrow street opening into the piazza directly in front of the magnificent façade of the Pitti palace.

the Via Maggio, over the Ponte a Santa Trinità. There Mary came to a full stop as they reached the crown of that most beautiful of bridges. Looking down the river, the sun was tipping the far distant and rugged outline of the Carrara mountains, and gilding the beautiful masses of the Cascine woods in the foreground. In the other direction was the peculiar and very striking fabric of the Ponte Vecchio, the only remaining specimen in Europe of that once common mode of construction, which turned a bridge into a street by loading it with dwellings, as was once the condition of old London Bridge. The irregular and singularly picturesque masses of this structure were in shadow; but the glimpse of the villa-covered hills beyond, seen through the open arches, that divide the line of buildings on the crown of the Ponte Vecchio, were flecked with capricious gleams on dark cypresses and white walls. And Arno at that autumn time was looking his

best. In truth, it was a point of view, to be equalled in its kind by few cities on earth.

“Oh, papa! you never led me to expect anything half so lovely as this!” cried Mary, as she paused and pressed her father’s arm. “What a beautiful city! I declare myself in love with Florence;—a regular case of love at first sight!”

“Perhaps to be followed by proportionable disappointment, and hatred, like most other cases of the same sort, my dear,” quoth sober fifty to enthusiast eighteen.

“Now, papa, do not be detestable! I am sure old fogy-ism must be out of character at Florence.”

“My love, it is the nature of papas to be detestable; and I have every reason to believe old fogy-ism to be a world-wide institution. I should have been disappointed for all that, if you had passed the Ponte Santa Trinità for the first time without being struck by it. But now that you have done the

proper enthusiasm very prettily in the right place, and uttered the regulation ohs! and ahs! with perfect propriety, come along and let us look after my picture."

"Caustic old fogy!" she hissed into her father's ear, administering at the same time a sharp pinch on his arm.

"My dear! The want of sensibility, which characterizes fogy-ism, does not extend to the epidermis. I take it, indeed, that as it recedes from the heart, it is apt to concentrate itself in the skin."

"In that case I think you may bear a few pinches yet, without much extra suffering."

And so the pair, each of whom thought the hours spent in companionship with the other the pleasantest in their lives, went on, Mary gazing and asking questions at every step, through the Piazza Santa Trinità, and so to the picture gallery in the neighbourhood of the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, of which Mr. Patringham was in search.

We know the agreeable surprise which was in store for him there. Pippo had not yet varnished his picture ; and the practised eye of the purchaser appreciated all the skill with which the expression of the original had been reproduced, and the tone imitated. As for Mary, she was enchanted, not only with her father's purchase, but with a hundred other pictures and works of art, exhibited in the extensive gallery, which had once been part of the cloisters and adjoining halls of a monastery ;—statuettes, bronzes, terra-cottas, &c. &c. &c., the inexhaustible débris of the wealth of Italy in her palmy day. While her father was critically examining Pippo Lonari's work, and settling with Signor Tanari about the liberal price to be paid for it, she was ranging through the rooms and galleries, from object to object, gathering new ideas and impressions as readily and greedily as a bee collects its store in a varied flower bed. At one moment she was gazing with more of

curiosity than admiration at a quaint specimen of the art of the "trecentisti," with its long emaciated figures on a gold ground, and handsomely restored, gothic carved frame, hung high on the wall of what had once been the monks' chapter-house. In the next she was charmed by a little bit of landscape background in an Annunciation by Crivelli, placed "on the line" with other special treasures in a little sanctum, that had formerly been a chapel. Then she was crouching to examine the delicate arabesque tracery on a fragment of carved walnut-wood; and anon detecting with true artistic instinct the lines of beauty in a sadly mutilated but still precious *terra cotta* Madonna, propped up against the wall of the quondam cloister.

At last she paused longer than her impatience and the variety of novelty around her had yet permitted her to do, before a small, unframed picture, which she had found among several other equally undistin-

guished canvases, on the ground leaning against the wall. Evidently it had not been deemed worthy of any prominent place, where it would have been likely to attract a purchaser's attention. It was very clearly a modern picture, and represented a young mother with her sick child, before a picture of the Madonna in a church. The infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, was laid on the pavement at the foot of the shrine, and a ray from the lamp suspended above it fell on the sick worn face, and told plainly enough the object of the mother's prayers. She was kneeling with the child in front of her, towards which she was stretching both extended arms as recommending the little suffering one to the pity of her who had known the sorrows of a mother; while the upper part of the figure was raised to its extent; and the head, thrown back in an agony of supplication, showed an upturned face of rare and very impressive beauty, com-

bined with an intensity of woe and passionate entreaty. It was one of those pictures from which a sympathetic gazer removes his eyes with difficulty, and which he still less readily succeeds in dismissing from his memory.

Mary remained entranced before it for several minutes, till the tears gathered in her eyes. Then returning to the room, where her father and Signor Tanari were still talking about the famous copy, she said :

“Papa! you must come and look at a picture I have found here in another room. There is a world of interesting and beautiful things of all sorts. I should have been so sorry to have missed coming here. But this one little picture has struck me more than all the rest. I dare say in my ignorance I may have bestowed my admiration very much amiss. But I must declare that it appears to me the very poetry of painting.”

So saying she led her father, with Signor Tanari following them, to the remote corner in which she had found the little picture.

“Ah! Is that the picture which has so pleased the Signorina?” said Signor Tanari, well contented that his wealthy customer’s daughter should manifest so promising a disposition as an amateur, but perhaps rather disappointed that her admiration had not fallen on some more important object. “Yes; the Signorina shows her judgment. It is a very pretty little thing.”

Meantime Mr. Patringham had lifted the picture and placed it on an easel; and was carefully examining it.

“Indeed, Mary,” said he, “I think you have shown your judgment. It is a very pretty thing,—a very pretty picture, indeed. I suppose I must reward your discrimination by making you a present of it, eh?”

“Oh, papa, I should so like to have it!” said Mary.

“Pray, Signor Tanari,” said Mr. Patringham, speaking slowly and distinctly in not *very* incorrect, though very Britishly pro-

nounced Italian, “by whom is this picture ; and what is the price of it ?”

Now Signor Tanari understood English very tolerably, and could speak it at need quite as well as Mr. Patringham could speak Italian. When there was no such need, he was wont to keep his linguistic acquirements in the background. So he answered in Italian, after a moment’s consideration—

“It is a strange coincidence, truly, that the Signorina should have been attracted by this little picture among all there are here ; for it is by the very same artist who made the copy of the Cardellino for *Vossignoria* ; a very meritorious young artist. His name is Lonari.”

“Singular enough, indeed !” said Mr. Patringham. “I must make Signor Lonari’s acquaintance. What is the price of the picture ?”

“Only forty scudi !” returned the dealer.

“It would be worth more, but that the artist is quite a young man!”

The picture had not been bought by Signor Tanari. It had only been left in his gallery by the painter, on the very remote chance of finding a purchaser. And Pippo would have been glad enough to meet with one at about sixteen dollars instead of forty. *Now* it would depend on Signor Tanari's generosity how much of the forty scudi would find its way into the artist's pocket; on his generosity stimulated in some degree by the reflection that it was under the circumstances very possible that the painter might learn the price paid from the purchaser himself.

Picture dealers do not approve of acquaintanceship between picture purchasers and painters; but when Mr. Patringham at once agreed to take the picture at the price named, and then added, taking out his pocket-book and pencil, “What did you

say, Signor Tanari, was the name and address of the young artist?" there was no avoiding the evil.

"Filippo Lonari is his name," said he ; "and if *Vossignoria* will permit he shall wait on you."

"No ! no !" persisted Mr. Patringham, with his pencil still in his hand ; "a painter's studio is always the best place to see him in. Tell me where I shall find him."

So "*Filippo Lonari, Casa Barbini, Via dell' Amore, 3° piano,*" was carefully entered in the pocket-book of the old man of business. And he and Mary returned to the Piazza Pitti, talking all the way of the charm of their new purchase.

CHAPTER VII.

A VISIT TO THE VIA DELL' AMORE.

THE reader will have had no difficulty in guessing whose were the features that had been reproduced on the canvas which had so powerfully excited the interest of Mary Patringham. Pippo had painted the picture shortly after the death of his sister, during the first ardour of his admiration for La Beata's peculiar beauty, and while the especial aptitude of her features and turn of character, for the expression of high and pure tragic sentiment, was fresh and vivid in his mind. The idea of the subject did credit to Pippo's intelligence; for the emotions required to be represented were just such as La Beata had been at once able to

comprehend and make her own. She had thrown herself into the conception with all the force of her heart and soul. Pippo had very ably transferred to canvas what he had seen before him ; and a picture most admirably true to nature, and irresistibly appealing to the sympathies of all who saw it, was the result.

The copy of the Cardellino was not to be sent home till it had been varnished. But the new purchase was, at Mary's express desire, delivered at the apartment of the Piazza Pitti that same evening. Mrs. Pattingham cordially expressed her full approval and admiration of the little picture : and though she raised some objection to the "young woman kneeling to say her prayers before an image," admitted that there were at least none of those "things not fit to be seen in pictures or out of them," which had sometimes offended her in works of "high art."

Mary was eager for the projected visit to

the artist's studio. But her father, though by no means likely to forget his intentions with regard to Signor Lonari, was unwilling to defer the high pleasure he had promised himself, of introducing his daughter to the great Florence galleries. So the next three or four days were passed in initiating Mary into that new world, the glories of which almost, but not quite, made her forget her own little art treasure at home.

Meanwhile, the rising fortunes of Pippo Lonari had been the talk of many a knot of struggling brother-artists, at the café Michael-Angiolo, or the Bottegone.* It was told how his copy of the Cardellino had been sold to a great English "milordo," at a fabulous price; and how it had been admired to such a degree, that the enthusiastic "milordo" had immediately made diligent inquiry for any other existing works of the

* Literally "great shop," a much frequented café, on the piazza of the cathedral, so called.

same artist, and had instantly bought, for the monstrous sum of forty dollars, a little bit of a thing;—*quel quadrettino, sai, che fece della Beata in atto di preghiera davanti alla Madonna.**

“Yes, he painted it in the first days of his love-affair with the poor little thing,” answered another.

“*Già! lo fece con amore; ed era belloccio, ve’!*”† added a third.

And so Pippo Lonari’s great luck was the talk and envy of his little world; and none of his compeers doubted but that a career of success and fortune was open before him.

There had been also, as may be imagined, speculations, hopes, and castle-building in the studio in the Via dell’ Amore. Not that Pippo had been informed of the important circumstance of the great “milordo” having

* That little picture, thou knowest, that he made of *La Beata* in prayer before the *Madonna*.

† Yes! he painted it “con amore;” and it was a bit to charm the eye, I can tell you.

asked for his address, and taken note of it in his pocket-book. Worthy Signor Tanari had not judged it opportune to communicate that fact unnecessarily. The Englishman might mean little or nothing by asking for the address. He might forget all about it: such things occurred every day. The painter and the customer might never come face to face after all, if he said nothing to Pippo of the inquiries that had been made. The proposed visit, therefore, which Mary was looking forward to with so much curiosity, was altogether unexpected in the *Via dell' Amore*.

None the less had Pippo and *La Beata* eagerly discussed the hopes to which the purchase of the little picture was calculated to give rise. Pippo was most sanguine in his expectations. With the overweening vanity and self-glorification of a temperament more French than Italian in this respect, he doubted not that his genius had at last been recognized, and that a career of fame and

fortune was before him. La Beata, even had she doubted, could not have found it in her heart to mar the happiness of his day-dreams by a word of misgiving. But her faith in him was far too absolute to admit the possibility of any such doubt. His every word was gospel to her simple hero-worship. Nor was her mind ever once struck by the unvarying selfishness of those brilliant outlooks into the future, which would have been painfully apparent to any third person who should have overheard these conversations. Had poor Tina thought of looking for her own figure, in the bright phantasmagoric views of Pippo's vanity-lighted magic-lantern, she must have been struck by the total absence of it. There was no "you" in his castle-building; scarcely the faintest appearance of "we;" it was all "I, I, I." But Pippo's heart and thoughts were exclusively full of himself. Little Tina's were as entirely occupied by the same subject. So

there was no clashing in their day-dreaming.

Meantime Pippo and his counsellor and model had planned a new picture, which was to be the second stepping-stone on his road to fortune. This time *La Beata* was to personate the heroine of a well-known legend, which tells of a girl who lost her reason on hearing tidings of the death of her lover in a far country, and who passed her whole subsequent life in ceaseless expectation of his return. Again the subject was well chosen, with reference to the special capabilities of the model. In front of a humble dwelling, in one of those strangely situated and picturesque hill villages of Tuscany, which look out from among the chestnut woods over far-winding valleys below, an aged couple were represented, watching with wistful, loving eyes the poor lost one, who, with hand upraised to enjoin silence, was bending forward with straining ear and eye, from a rock

which commanded the valley and its road far beneath, absorbed in the intense longing which had swallowed up all the other powers of the mind.

The picture was as yet only just sketched in on the canvas ; but the composition already promised well. La Beata had thoroughly entered into the spirit of her part. Her attitude and expression were admirable. If only the painter could succeed in transferring to his canvas the conception as she embodied it for him, it would assuredly be a telling picture. But the so perfect assumption of the part assigned to her in this little drama was by no means costless to La Beata. The intense identification of herself with its sufferings, by which alone she was able so completely to express them, was too real while it lasted, for the ideas evoked to be summarily dismissed at pleasure from the imagination. And often, in the effort to free herself from the oppression of them, she

shuddered at the thought, that agony, such as she had been imagining, was the portion of some, and might be her own.

That a fate yet more dreadful than that of the unfortunate, whose lot so terrified, her,—that a separation more cruel than that caused by death could be possible, was beyond the limited powers of La Beata's imagination.

One bright November morning, while the painter was at his easel, and Tina was "in position" before him, thoroughly absorbed in the deep tragedy of her part, they were disturbed by an unusually violent pull at the little bell which hung inside the door.

"Chi è?" cried she, suddenly recalled from the world of imagination to that of her own little domestic duties; while Pippo uttered an exclamation not implying benevolent feeling towards the applicant for admission.

There was no reply of "amici" in the

proper open sesame form ; but on opening the door she saw a servant in livery, who in very English Italian inquired if Signor Lonari lived there.

Pippo's heart beat fast as he heard the question, and sprung to the door to answer it himself. It was coming then, the fortune he had looked for ! An English stranger was seeking him out in his obscurity. The great career was opening before him. He was a little disappointed at finding that it was a servant only at the door ; but his golden visions shone out clearer than ever, when Mr. Patringham's card was put into his hand, and the servant told him that his master and mistress were below, and requested permission to visit his studio.

"There is a carriage with two ladies, Pippo !" cried Tina, who had run to peep down into the street from the window ; "will they come up, too ?"

"Of course they will come up !" said

Pippo ; “ what else do you suppose they are there for ? Put things in order a little, quick ! Throw those plates and the flask into the bed-room ! Put that copy of the Fornarina on the easel ;” he added, as he hurried, maulstick in hand, down stairs to receive his visitors.

Mr. Pattingham announced himself as the purchaser of the admirable copy of Raffael’s great picture which Signor Lonari had been so good as to make for him, saying he was come to thank him for it, and had brought his wife and daughter to see his studio.

Pippo proceeded to usher the party up stairs, “ confounding himself in excuses,” as the French say, on the steepness, darkness, and length of the way which led to his abode ; excuses which, indeed, appeared to be called for by the evident difficulty with which the elder lady performed the ascent. She struggled on bravely, however, till she reached the top ; but arrived there with very

visible signs of "distress," in wind and limb.

La Beata was standing, as the party entered the studio, at the furthest part of the large room, and looked as if she would very willingly have retreated still further, through the wall of it. The strangers advanced towards the easel in the middle of the room, and Pippo stepped forward to do the honours of his studio. But La Beata observing the laborious panting of the stout brown lady, could not refrain from gliding noiselessly to her side, and timidly inviting her to sit on the green silk sofa, which has been celebrated in a previous chapter.

The offer was gladly and graciously accepted : and the attention of the visitors was at the same time drawn, not a little to her discomfiture, on poor little Tina.

Shyness is not an ordinary characteristic of Italians of any class or age. Their freedom from it is occasioned by no extra endow-

ment of boldness or self-confidence, but simply by an absence of self-consciousness. Their minds are in general too objective in their nature to be liable to the embarrassment suffered by more subjective idiosyncrasies, under the consciousness of being exposed to observation. But there was a shrinking timidity in *La Beata's* nature, which had been unduly increased by the influence of a life passed in the twilight shade of almost complete seclusion,—a seclusion of feeling and thought, which, as has been seen, had continued even after she had been constrained to mix personally with the self-contained little artist's world, by her avocations as a painter's model. May it not, perhaps, have been also, that some of those words, which had fallen from old *Maestro Borsoli* in the course of that memorable conversation in his studio had produced a greater effect on her mind, when they recurred to her afterwards, than they had

seemed to do at the time, and that they were now bearing their fruit? Those "people of a different class," who, as the old painter warned her, would be sure to consider her position there in Pippo's studio-home a disgraceful one,—may not the idea have painfully suggested itself to her, that these strangers were probably of that unknown class? And if so, it may be supposed that Tina was then for the first time experiencing—vaguely and imperfectly—a sentiment, which a few more lessons in civilized morality would render intolerable to her.

It is curious, too, that it was Mary Patringham of whom she seemed to herself to be most afraid. She thought she should feel less embarrassed if she were only called upon to stand before the kind-looking elderly couple, whose eyes were now resting on her. Yet Mary assuredly did not look otherwise than kind. But the causes and sources of our emotions hide themselves in so many

strange ways,—of feminine emotions more especially,—that it is often difficult to guess in what remote corner of the heart to look for them.

“*Et Leicester était là !*” was the thought, which gave its sweetness to Queen Mary’s triumph over her rival ; and we all remember the thrill produced by the words, as uttered by the great tragic actress who personated the hapless queen. Was there operating in Tina’s heart, quite unconsciously to herself, some result of an inverse, but analogous feeling ? Was there a latent consciousness, that her poor little frail person, with its pale delicacy and almost ghostly beauty, was effaced into absolute nothingness by the splendid radiance of the blooming English girl ? and that “Pippo was there ” the while !

Whatever may have been the hidden sources of the feeling Tina was suffering the new sensation of very painful shyness ; and

the matter was not mended by the evident and marked attention, and even curiosity, with which both Mr. and Miss Patringham were regarding her. Mary had absolutely started when her eyes first lighted on La Beata's face. The cause of her surprise may be easily guessed. She had at once recognized the original of the figure, which had so much impressed her, in the treasured picture her father had bought for her in the gallery of Signor Tanari; and a glance of mutual intelligence between the father and the daughter had shown that Mr. Patringham had been equally quick to see the resemblance. It would have been easy for them to exchange their remarks on the subject in English, as our aristocratic countrymen in Italian studios and such places are too apt to do. But Mary preferred the more direct and more gracious course of at once claiming acquaintance with the owner of features already so well

known to her. So she stepped forward to the shrinking Italian girl with a frank smile ; and, with that correct and academically constructed, but most wonderfully spoken Italian, which well educated English young ladies import into Italy, said—

“I think, Signora, that I may claim to be acquainted with you in some degree, though I never had the pleasure of seeing you before. I know well by heart every feature of a certain young mother in prayer before the Virgin, with her sick child on the church pavement in front of her.”

“In truth,” said Mr. Patringham, less grammatically but more fluently than his daughter, “the picture is one to impress itself on the memory. I came here with the hope of making acquaintance with the artist who painted it ; but I am doubly fortunate,” he added, turning and bowing with old-fashioned gallantry to poor little Tina, “in meeting at the same time with the original of that very charming figure.”

Pippo was in a heaven of gratified vanity and golden hopes. "It was truly the greatest pleasure a poor artist could have," he said, "to be so appreciated by such a connoisseur." Yes! He had painted the little picture that had been fortunate enough to meet his lordship's approbation, *con amore*. It was *sentito*, and that, perhaps, was the secret of its success.

"With the rare advantage of such a sitter as the Signora Lonari," rejoined Mr. Patringham, who seeing that Tina was evidently at home in the artist's studio, concluded that she was of course his wife, "success was at least half insured."

The Signora Lonari! The words spoken so much as a matter of course, struck a chord that vibrated unpleasantly in the hearts both of Pippo and La Beata, and caused them to exchange a rapid glance, partly of mutual intelligence, but in much greater part of mutual observation, each being eager to

mark how the stranger's error affected the other. As for La Beata, her suspicion was confirmed, that these rich and grand visitors most assuredly belonged to that unknown world with whose disapprobation she had been threatened. It seemed, moreover, as if the apparently very trivial circumstance of the utterance of that hitherto unpronounced title, which had never before fallen on her ear, nor suggested itself to her imagination, had in some mysterious way exercised a power of opening her intelligence to the nature of her false position to a degree, which neither her own vague ideas of right and wrong, nor worthy Maestro Borsoli's warnings had availed to effect. It opened to her a new view of the matter, and one, more comprehensible and tangible to her than the more elevated considerations on which it really depended. She was *not* the Signora Lonari. She was only La Beata! She was assuming, then, a position to which she had no right.

She was living on false pretences;—pretending to be what she was not! She was deceiving these English strangers. And quick as thought in the track of these newly suggested ideas, came with a pang never felt before a dread of being found out, a fear of exposure, a sense of shame, all new, and exquisitely painful in the lightning-like rapidity of their sudden stab.

It was clear, however, at all events, that she was safe for the present from the ill opinion and disparaging observation of the strangers. But her safety rested on grounds by no means calculated to lessen the embarrassing shyness she felt in their presence.

While these painful thoughts were rushing through poor Tina's mind, and Pippo was showing and explaining his new sketch to Mr. Pattingham, Mary, pleased with the opportunity of bringing her Italian to bear on a genuine native, was persevering in her determination to improve her acquaintance

with *La Beata*. She was really attracted towards the Italian girl by one of those spontaneous sympathies which, however capricious they may seem, do not, we may well believe, manifest themselves without the existence of good and sufficient reasons, which influence our emotional nature more quickly than slower paced judgment can recognize or give any account of them.

A more striking contrast can hardly be imagined between two young girls so nearly of the same age, than that presented by Mary Patringham and *La Beata*. A thousand similes might be found to illustrate it. They were to each other, as the rose to the lily of the valley; as brilliant, warm sunlight to the pale moonbeam, &c. &c. It was not in personal appearance alone, but in everything that constitutes an individuality that the same marked contrast existed. In intellectual culture, in station, in destiny, in bodily temperament, in habiliments it was equally

striking. Mary was a brilliant brunette. Her magnificent hair was several shades darker than, and almost as abundant as La Beata's chestnut-brown tresses. Both girls were beautiful ;—beyond question eminently so. But most men would have deemed probably that the pale face and slenderer figure of the Italian in her humble dress, almost as void of modish shape as those of the lengthy saints whom she so often personated, served as a foil to the English girl's perfection of radiant youth and beaming health ; while some few might have felt that all this brilliance was an advantageous background for throwing into relief the exquisite delicacy and marble purity of La Beata's more spiritual type of beauty.

It would have been impossible for a much less gentle spirit than that of poor Tina to resist the kindliness of Mary Patringham's advances. And by the time her father had finished his conversation with Pippo, and

had arranged that the artist should call on him in the Piazza Pitti on the next day but one for the purpose of talking over a commission for copying a certain picture in the Corsini gallery, the bashfulness of *La Beata* had been conquered, and the curiously contrasted pair were friends.

It is not necessary to follow the talk that ensued between Pippo and Tina, as soon as the former returned from conducting the visitors to their carriage. They were in perfect accord in praising the artistic taste, courtesy, and liberality of the English family. But it was remarkable that no allusion was made by either to that mistake of Mr. Pattingham's, when he talked of *La Signora Lonari*. Thus there was already one subject on which perfect openness and community of feeling no longer existed between them. Tina was far from being aware of the fatal nature of this newly-arisen symptom, but she instinctively felt that it

was amiss, and was painfully oppressed by the consciousness of it.

The conversation in the Patringham carriage, as it returned to the Piazza Pitti, was more completely unrestrained, for there was no topic marked as "dangerous" in the minds of any one of the family party.

"What a lovely face she has!" cried Mary. "I don't know when I have seen one that has so attracted me as that pale, shy Signora Lonari's. I don't wonder at her husband's success in rendering the poetry of emotion; he has but to read in her features!"

"Case No. 2 of love at first sight, eh, Mary?" said her father; "unless, indeed, there may have been twenty other cases between the declaration of your passion for Florence, and your present love at first sight, which have not reached me."

"But is she not an interesting little creature?" persisted Mary. "I made sure of your sympathy, papa, this time."

“Well, my dear, and what have I said to the contrary? But it does so happen that elderly gentlemen are not so subject to those sudden attacks of love at first sight, as they might have been a quarter of a century or so before.”

“Now, mamma, I appeal to you; is not Madame Lonari a very pleasing person?”

“Well, Mary,” replied Mrs. Patringham, “she seemed to me a very decent, proper-behaved young woman,—more so, to tell the truth, than that husband of hers. But I didn’t see anything much to fall in love with. I should say she ought to wear flannel on her chest, by the look of her; and I’ll warrant she thinks o’ nothing of the sort. Young things never do, till it is too late.”

“Suppose you were to give her a lecture upon the subject, mamma! It would be but charitable.”

“Law, Mary! How can I go a lecturing? You’ll be for sending me to Timbuctoo for a missionary next! It’s ten to one

I shall never set eyes on the young woman again."

"Ah! but it's a great deal more than ten to one that you will, mamma! For I have set my heart on a thing which I think papa will not object to. If I am really to turn our stay in Italy to any account in making progress with my drawing, I must have something to draw from better than copying those eternal chalk heads. I should so like to try and make a sketch from that beautiful pale face! I am sure I should do it *con amore*, as Signor Lonari said. It would give me an interest in my drawing, more than I have ever felt yet. Don't you think so, papa? It's quite clear, from their manner of living, that a little assistance would be acceptable. And Signora Lonari could not have any objection to coming to our house to sit to me, you know, papa! And when Signor Lonari comes to you on Thursday, I want you to make the proposal to him. Will you indulge me in this, papa?"

"I quite agree with you, my dear, that the young woman is a very striking model. Her style of face and figure is certainly singularly picturesque. I am not at all surprised at your wish to have her for a sitter. And I don't know," he added, after a moment's consideration, "that I see any objection in the way. No doubt, as you say, a little money would be acceptable enough. And the proposal might be made with delicacy, so as not to wound any susceptibilities. Well, if your mother consents, I have no objection to try the negociation."

"There is a darling papa! I am sure mamma will make no difficulty. And now you see, mamma, you will have an opportunity of doing a little good by putting her in the right way about proper clothing. She does look very delicate, poor thing!"

"Well, my dear, I can have no objection to anything your papa thinks right. And, as I said, the young woman appeared to me a

very decent body, very much so indeed. But all is not gold that glitters. And of course, Mr. P., you will make all inquiries and ascertain that she is a proper person, and quite respectable. It would not do, you know, to have anybody in the house, especially for such a purpose, that one knew nothing about."

"Certainly, my dear," returned he. "I will look to all that. But I do not imagine there can be much danger of anything of that sort. Signor Tanari recommended this Lonari to me very highly, and there can be little doubt that his wife is a perfectly respectable person."

So it was settled, to Mary's great contentment, that if no such impediment were discovered—which she herself considered to be quite out of the question—her father was on the Thursday, when Signor Lonari came, as had been arranged, to Piazza Pitti, to propose to him to permit his wife to give Miss Partringham a certain number of sittings.

Meanwhile, symptoms that Pippo Lonari's fortunes were on the rise, and that a prosperous career was opening itself before him, began to develop themselves more decisively and rapidly, than the small events which have been narrated would to English ideas appear sufficient to account for. But in the little world of Florence much smaller circumstances may set a-flowing the tide which leads on to fortune, than could avail to produce a similar result in our larger and more severely competitive social system.

An important copy commissioned, an original picture sold on the strength of the success of the copy, a carriage full of English visitors at his door, an appointment to confer on other art matters at the house of a great milordo ;—all this was more than enough to set all the artistic community of Florence talking, envying, and speculating. Already Pippo was the centre of success-worshipping knots of comrades and rivals at the café he

frequented, to whom he set forth his own successes, the liberality and discrimination of his new patrons, and their admiration for his genius in somewhat more glowing colours than were warranted by the real circumstances as they had occurred.

And La Beata sat at home the while in the bleak studio under the tiles, weaving *her* golden tissue of the future also, in the web of which, one or two threads of a less brilliant hue would, despite her efforts, persist in mingling themselves. They were spun — these unfortunate mind-filaments — not so much from the words of Signor Bor-soli, on the occasion of that memorable conversation in his studio, as from the manner with which Pippo had received them when repeated to him, and from those unlucky chance words which had been dropped by Mr. Patringham. Her meditations were not, therefore, of wholly unchequered rose-colour, as she sat waiting for Pippo's

return from his important visit to the Piazza Pitti.

She ran to the door as she heard his foot on the stair; and saw at once, on opening it, that he brought good tidings.

“Things are going well then, *Pippo mio*,” she said; “the strangers appreciate thee. Now, let us have all the story of thy interview with them! How went it? Didst thou speak with the *bella Signorina*?”

“I should think so!” vaunted Pippo. “*Mi vogliono bene, tutti quanti, ve’ !*”*

“I believe you! but tell me, Pippo, have they ordered anything?”

“What do you think I was called there for, eh? Ordered! of course they have. He takes the picture of the mad girl looking out for her lover;—sixty dollars, not a crazia less! Then I am to make a copy for him in the Palazzo Corsini. My fortune is made, I tell you.”

* “They like me well, all of them, see you.”

“Bravo! Pippo mio! I knew well that thou wert worth more than any of them. Even old Signor Francesco told me as much.”

And a shadow passed across the bright sky of La Beata's exultation, as the recollection of the old painter's prognostication brought back with it to her mind the other things he had said.

“But look here, Tina!” continued Pippo; “there is another thing they want. I had almost forgotten it. It seems that the Signorina paints, and she wants you to sit to her. They will pay, you understand. So I settled that you should go as soon as I can finish the new picture. I shall want three or four more days. But *per Bacco*, they are queer folks, these English! He asked me certain questions, the old fellow! I believe he was afraid you would steal the silver spoons. I reassured him! But they pay well, . . . *e basta.*”*

* And that is enough.

The fact was that Pippo had entirely failed to comprehend the gist of the few words Mr. Patrington had said with as much delicacy as possible, in obedience to his wife's caution on the subject of *La Beata*. An Englishman in Pippo's place would have understood the drift of them in an instant. But the Florentine artist, who had no idea that any hesitation in such a matter could arise from any other consideration than a care for the safety of one's property, had answered quite at cross purposes. And Mr. Patrington imagined that he had received the most satisfactory assurances of poor Tina's "respectability," while Pippo considered that he had been called on to answer for her honesty.

To *La Beata* this announcement was a matter of the most unbounded astonishment. Her first sensation was one of terror at the idea of having to appear alone in a strange house among strange people of a class so entirely new to her. But the remembrance

of the kind and gentle manner of the beautiful young English lady reassured her. And besides a kind of feeling that she was thus made a sharer in Pippo's rising fortune, and was in some sort bound up with him in his relationship with his new connections, was, though she rendered no account of the matter to herself, soothing and pleasurable to her. In any case Pippo had told her she was to go. So there could be nothing more to be said on the subject; and her meditations with regard to it reverted to the gown and shawl possibilities of her scanty wardrobe. And the conversation between her and Pippo passed on to the consideration of the hours of sitting, which would be necessary to complete the sketch of the new picture, so that it might be done in time for Tina to enter on her new engagement.

CHAPTER VIII.

LAUDADIO BENINCASA, THE WAX-CHANDLER.

WE all know the magic effects of success, the homage it commands, its troops of friends. And men are apt sometimes to feel with a dash of bitterness, which is perhaps hardly reasonable, that of all those who bring the tribute of their hero-worship to success achieved, not one was able to recognize the merit, which had not yet achieved it. But such a reflection seems to suppose that those who gather around us in our day of triumph had avoided us in our day of struggle; whereas the simple fact is that they had never seen us in the crowd. The success is the candlestick on which our light must be put, before it can give light to others.

The case, however, is not quite the same when old friends who have parted company from us in adversity range up alongside as soon as a fair wind fills our sails. But it will generally be reasonable as well as wise not to judge too severely even these worshippers of a rising sun; for how few are gifted with the capacity of knowing what is worshipful, till warned of it by the worship of those around them?

Pippo had already become the centre of a circle of new friends, whose recognition of his merit he enjoyed as one of its legitimate consequences. But the most important "adhesion" to his standard belonged to the second of the above categories; and was exemplified in a personage who must be formally presented to the reader. Laudadio Benincasa was an important man in Florence. Those sufficiently inexperienced in the world's ways to estimate a man's social importance by his appearance, would certainly

have never guessed that such was the case. And to those uninitiated into the obscurer paths and relationships of Italian life, the announcement of his social grade and avocation would in no case have afforded any assistance towards a right appreciation of his position. He was a little old man, very bald, and with one leg somewhat shorter than the other; probably in consequence of an accident in early life. His constant, never-changing dress seemed to indicate that the wearer was in some way connected with the Church. It consisted of a suit of very rusty black cloth; the coat cut straight at the collar, and very long and square in the tails; the waistcoat as high in the collar as the coat; and the small-clothes fastened at the knee with small silver buckles, and continued by very coarse black worsted stockings. A very redundant and very yellow muslin neckcloth at one end, and a pair of short but very wide low cut

shoes at the other, also fastened by silver buckles on the instep, completed his costume. The general effect was one of seediness, shabbiness, and utter want of gloss, yet so it was that his appearance did not produce an impression of the wearer's poverty. He always carried a handsome ivory-mounted bamboo cane for the purpose of assisting the laborious dot-and-go-one walk occasioned by his lameness; and constantly wore a small cameo set in seed pearls, stuck as a breast-pin through the ends of his neckcloth.

Such was the outward man,—almost as well known in Florence as the Campanile itself,—of Laudadio Benincasa, the wax-chandler.

It often occurs, that men of superior intelligence and energy acquire a social standing and influence quite disproportioned to, and despite of, the humble vocation in which fortune has placed them. But old Laudadio had nothing about him superior

in any way; and the consideration he enjoyed was accorded him by his fellow citizens by no means in spite of, but altogether in consequence of his calling.

Is the reader puzzled to guess why the business of wax-chandling should be so highly esteemed in Florence? Let him call to mind the influence once exercised by the silversmiths at Ephesus. The reflection may serve to put him in the way of partly understanding the secret of Signor Laudadio Benincasa's influential position among his fellow citizens. Wax candles are* to the full as necessary to "all the best interests of society" in Florence, as silver shrines and images once were in Ephesus. Your large wax-chandler in such a community as that of Florence (such as it was, at least, up to the first half of the present century), is a

* Should we not, rather, thanks be to God! say "were?" For assuredly the beginning of the end is rising on the horizon in this matter also.

man much connected in business with all the clergy, and especially with the dignitaries of the collegiate churches and ecclesiastical corporations; an habitual frequenter of sacristies, and chapter-halls; a notably devout man by the necessities of his trade, (as were those Ephesian silversmiths); and a crony and confidential intimate of the devout. Romish clerical influence is ever essentially and notoriously back-stairs influence,—back-stairs from the royal palace, into whose private chambers it mounts by ways closed to all other comers, to the poor man's dwelling, much too humble to possess materially any back-stairs at all, but never too humble, if it be the abode of a domestic community, to admit of unavowed channels of communication for the passage of this all-permeating malaria. Like all other secretly operating forces, this subtle influence is shared by, and makes use of many agents and agencies besides those, who might most

naturally be expected to be entrusted with its secrets. In every highly complicated piece of mechanism little wheels, and very unappearing wires move larger ones, and bring into gear powerful forces. And in the wonderfully complex and most perfectly elaborated apparatus for the percolation of priestly influence and power through every part of the mass of the body social, an important share in the wielding of that power is for similar reasons often found lodged in very strange hands.

To these less apparent, but among an Italian population, recognized and in a general way understood sources of social importance Signor Laudadio Benincasa united the more simple ones of high commercial respectability, long hereditary standing among the trading aristocracy of his native city, and very ample wealth. In a strictly metaphorical sense, the old wax-chandler was known to be "a very warm man." For

his business, inherited from more than one generation of profitably wax-chandling ancestors, was a very good one. The great boast of Romanism is that it leavens with religion the whole heavy mass of daily life, making its ordinances part and parcel of its every function and occupation. And what is Romish religion without wax candles! A trade must surely be a profitable one, which supplies wants generated in proportion to the occasions of human follies, faults, and frailties. Where wax candles are an important means for easing the twinges of that "conscience, which makes cowards of us all," it is good to be a wax-chandler. When, in addition to this, they are understood to be the most acceptable bribe that can be offered to intercessors supposed to have the power of dispensing blessings in this life, and mercy in the life beyond the grave, the trade is likely to be a brisk one. And old Laudadio was, as has been said, generally

understood to be something more than commonly well off.

The term "brisk," however, is hardly that by which his business should have been characterized. It was a good, steady, profitable business ; but in truth there was nothing *brisk* about it, or about his establishment. We are all acquainted with certain London firms, which from the height of their long-established reputation look down with intense contempt on all the devices of plate glass, gilding, and decoration, to which traders less firmly in possession of the market are fain to resort. Little or no display of goods is made in the windows grimy with the respectable dust of many years of these happy long-established ones. Plain black letters, long since become brown, painted on plain white door-posts long since yellow, declare, not so much the names of the prosperous firm, as the needlessness of mentioning what is so well known.

No effort of any kind is visible in the conduct of these privileged places of business; but everybody knows, that it is not *their* owners whose names may some day figure in the Gazette.

Now Laudadio Benincasa's establishment was a place of this kind. It was situated in a small quiet street in the oldest part of the city, a little to the south of the cathedral. His house—for it was his own, and had been his father's, from the garret to the cellar—was an old palace, once the seignorial residence of a noble family long since extinct, whose arms, sculptured on huge, heavy stone shields, mantled and crested, still adorned the corners of the building. It consisted of ground floor, first or noble floor —“*piano nobile*,” as the Florentines call it,—second floor, and an open *loggia*, or arcade, supported in front by stone pillars, in place of a third floor. The front was entirely of ashlar stone, black with the weather action

of centuries, with a huge and lofty *portecochère* in the centre, on each side of which were on the ground floor two large windows with handsome heavy stone mouldings, defended by iron gratings, not to be matched for size and massiveness in London, save at Newgate.

Such defences are common in the streets of Florence, being a legacy of the turbulent old times when every noble's house was necessarily intended to be a city fortress, capable of resisting any outbreak of popular violence. But a curious instance of the tendency men have so to accustom themselves to inevitable evils, as in process of time to look upon them as advantages, may be seen in the fact that the Florentines at the present day consider these huge prison encumbrances of their windows as ornamental! And new houses may be seen with their ground-floor rooms turned into amateur dungeons at a heavy expense, in obedience to

the fashion, which has learned to think it aristocratic to live in a prison.

Signor Laudadio Benincasa, however, had removed two of the enormous gratings from the front of his house, one from each side of the entrance ; and one of the windows thus liberated had been cut down to form the entrance to his shop, and the other that of his warehouse on the opposite side. The shop, occupying half the entire ground-floor front of the building, was lighted only by this doorway and by the remaining grated window, which was placed so high in the wall as to be above the level of a man's head when standing on the floor. There was, indeed, one other source of light ; but it was only a glimmer, which twinkling afar in the cavernous depths of the huge vaulted room, served but to make the darkness of the place more noticeable. This glimmer proceeded from a lamp of silver, hung up before a large representation of the Madonna

and child in *basso rilievo* of Lucca della Robbia ware, built into the wall at the back part of the shop.

The old wax-chandler was a widower of many years' standing ; and lived with an only daughter in pleasant sunshiny rooms behind the shop and warehouse, which looked on to an old-fashioned but very pretty little garden. The first and second floors were let, the first to a banking firm, doing business chiefly with the Levant, and the second as a dwelling to one of the partners. Old Laudadio had not the slightest need of the sums incoming from the rent of these parts of his house ; but neither would his comfort have been at all increased by occupying them. And a Florentine of any rank, except that of the wealthiest aristocracy, considers it as much a matter of course to let any rooms of his house, which he does not absolutely need for his own accommodation, as an Englishman would to let a vacant farm on his estate.

“CERERIA* DI LAUDADIO BENINCASA” was written in small, unappearing letters over the doorway of the shop. But the announcement was merely a compliance with trading usages: it was in no wise necessary for the information of any of Signor Benincasa’s customers. From the bursar of a wealthy convent, having to bespeak the hundreds of huge yard-long candles, needed for the celebration of some well-endowed obituary anniversary mass, to the poor mother desirous of investing a few halfpence in a taper to be burned at the shrine of some saint in special repute for bringing children safely through the measles,—all knew the *cereria* and knew the wares they wanted. There they all were, from the colossal Easter-candle of delicate white wax, brilliantly painted and decorated, and destined to receive episcopal blessing, and be solemnly lighted in front of the high altar of some cathedral church,

* *Cereria*, wax-chandlery, from *Cera*, wax.

down to the slenderest and yellowest little starveling of a taper, destined to afford ease to the conscience of the poorest sinner, at the easiest possible rate.

Such was Signor Laudadio Benincasa, such the nature of his business, and such the place where it was carried on.

Now the wealthy wax-chandler had been the intimate and life-long friend of Pippo Lonari's uncle the priest, who had educated the artist, and destined him to the tonsure. This priest, Antonio Lonari, had been a rising man; and would have probably reached some one of the higher positions in the Church, had he not died early; and by doing so left his nephew Pippo^{*} at liberty to renounce his ecclesiastical destination, and follow the dictates of his own inclination. Before entering the seminary at which he had been educated, Pippo, who had been left an orphan in his infancy, had been brought up in the house of his uncle's friend

Laudadio ; and all days of vacation or “outing,” permitted at the seminary, had been spent by him with his old friends at the *cereria*, with the wax-chandler and his daughter Beppina.

When Antonio Lonari died, worthy Signor Laudadio would have continued to give Pippo the benefit of all his friendship for his uncle, and would have been both willing and able to assist him materially in his ecclesiastical career. But the young man’s conduct in refusing to follow that career, and his throwing up all the advantages, which the education already bestowed upon him, and the future patronage of his uncle’s friend, would have assured to him, had caused a complete breach between the young artist and Signor Benincasa ; and Pippo “secularized” had been seen no more at the *cereria* nor in the pretty garden behind the old *palazzo*.

It is a fact, however, which we will for

the present assume as such, without devoting a hundred pages or so to an investigation of the causes of it, that daughters are apt to regard such matters differently from their papas. And Beppina Benincasa, between whom and Pippo there had always been very good intelligence from their childhood upward, could not help feeling that this "secularization" of her old playmate, however abominable, was not unpardonable. She neither denied nor doubted the assertion that Pippo was a reprobate. But after she had on one or two chance occasions seen the handsome young artist in his "secularized" state of existence, she could not help feeling, argue the matter with herself as she might, that she liked the reprobate with a handsome black beard and trousers better than the unexceptionable shaveling seminarist with his black gown down to his heels. A few years ago the long-robed little priestling of some twelve years old or so, and the

lively black-eyed child of ten had been as excellent friends and allies, as if the Church had not marked the former for her own. Possibly also the wealthy old wax-chandler had considered that circumstance as an important reason in favour of permitting such close acquaintance between his only child and young Lonari. But Beppina was just arriving at that time of life at which papas and daughters are sadly apt to have very decidedly opposing opinions on such subjects, when the change in Pippo's destiny caused the breach between him and her father.

This estrangement had not been submitted to by her with perfect resignation to the paternal will. Not that she had gone to the length of attempting any clandestine intercourse, either by speech or otherwise, with her old playmate, or had even ventured to defend the course he had taken, when her father expatiated on the enormity of it. She was perfectly convinced, indeed, of his

wickedness and reprobate condition; but nevertheless the fact was that she did not feel at all the less kindly towards him on account of it. I should almost say—but that I don't want to give rise to the idea that Beppina was other than a good girl—that she was all the more inclined to like him for his castaway position. No! not like him for it exactly! That, of course, could not be. But she felt a lively interest in him. Yes! that is the right phrase;—felt a warm interest in his welfare. But the heart, we know, is desperately wicked;—the female heart no less so than the male; though it seems almost incredible that it should be so! And Beppina was constantly returning to the subject of “poor Pippo” with her father, whose heart was much more chastened in this matter, and urging that forgiveness should be extended to the scapegrace. And each time that she had chanced, in the course of the Sunday or holiday even-

ing walk in the Cascine or on the Lungarno, to catch a sight of her old playmate, improved, alas! in outward appearance quite as much as he was deteriorated in inward grace, she attacked old Laudadio afresh on the duty of charitable construction and forgiveness.

And Beppina's will, enforced by Beppina's eloquence, was in most cases by no means without effect on her father. But in the matter of Pippo the graceless, he had been immoveably firm. To have abandoned the sacred calling to which he had been destined was bad, and was the ostensible reason for withdrawing all countenance from so scandalous a sinner; but to have abandoned it to become a beggar, an artist without employment, or probable chance of any, was in the eyes of the careful and thrifty old tradesman—it may be surmised without lack of charity—still worse.

Such was the position of matters, when

tidings of Pippo's suddenly improved prospects began to reach the ears of the old wax-chandler. The amount of good fortune which had befallen him, and of golden promise for the future, was, of course, as usual in such cases, made the most of in passing from mouth to mouth. An English *milordo* of enormous wealth and the highest rank had, it was declared, made him the most magnificent offers, and undertaken to assure him a brilliant career. His works were already sought for, and purchased before they were off the easel, &c.

Now, all this made a very material difference in worthy Signor Laudadio's estimate of his young friend Pippo's position, and of the sinfulness which he had been guilty of in reaching it. Nor did he at all attempt to disguise this change in his opinions. It appeared, then, that the young man had a real vocation for art. A real vocation, implanted by Providence, was assuredly not to be set

aside. It was one of the cases in which success, and success only, could justify the step that had been taken. It made all the difference in every point of view. As no position or career could be more miserable and hopeless than that of an unknown unemployed painter, so there was scarcely any at all within the limits of Signor Laudadio's social sphere which could offer brighter prospects and possibilities than that of a successful well-employed artist, occupying the foremost rank in his profession. Then Beppina. . . . Well! Perhaps she was right after all, the little puss! She generally had a shrewd notion of what was what. So much Signor Laudadio would confess.

And with such thoughts in his head the old wax-chandler hobbled off from his shop one evening to the café, determined to hold out the olive branch to Pippo, if he should be at all willing to accept it.

Old Laudadio was in the habit of fre-

quenting a quiet little café, where he met almost every night in the year the same set of old fellows of his own standing. But on this occasion he betook himself to the 'Botte-gone,' where he knew he should be likely to meet with the rising artist. The throng of people, tables, benches, and stools, which on summer evenings encroaches in front of this favourite café on the pavement of the piazza almost half-way across the wide space between it and the cathedral, was no longer there, for the evenings had begun to be fresh. But two or three little tables, and a few rheumatism-defying lovers of open air and moonlight, were still out on each side of the entrance to the café; and there, sure enough, was Pippo smoking his cigar, and haranguing a little knot of three or four admiring listeners.

"Oh! Signor Pippo!" cried the old gentleman, as he limped up awakening echoes from the huge towering wall of the cathedral

with every thump of his stick on the pavement, "you are the very man I wanted to see!"

"To think of seeing you here, Signor Laudadio!" returned Pippo, who understood in an instant what his old friend had come for, and why, just as well as if he had read in his heart all those considerations which have been set forth, and who was far too worldly-wise a man to allow any temper to interfere with what might be advantageous to him. "Is the Café Greco burned down? for I should think nothing less would drive you out of your old haunts."

"The Café Greco stands just where it has stood any time this thirty years," rejoined the old man, "and I should be there in my usual corner if I had not come here on purpose to bring you my congratulations. But *perdinci bacco!** it is too cold to stay here.

* An exclamation invented and used by those Tuscans who are scrupulous enough to prefer avoiding the impropriety of saying "per dio Bacco."

Come in, and take a *ponce*, and let us have a talk of old times."

"With all my heart, Signor Laudadio! I have not forgotten all your kindness to me, though 'tis years ago. And how is Beppina?"

"Ah! Beppina! She has not forgotten you either. She has always been wanting me to make it up with you. But what would you have? How could I bring to my house a young fellow who had made a scandal, and was determined to go to the dogs? But now you are going quite in a different direction, by what I hear, and that makes all the difference, you know."

"To be sure! to be sure!" said Pippo, not the least moved by any feeling of moral indignation to quarrel with the possibilities of bread and butter set before him in this frank profession of success-worship.

And so the chat went on in a very friendly tone till the *ponce* was out, and Pippo had told, with as much colouring as he could

venture to lay on, all his past and expectations of future fortune.

“Yes! English patronage is a very fine thing!” said old Laudadio, taking his young friend by the button, as they stood at the door of the café about to separate. “They are rich, the heretics! and they spend their money. But what should you say, my lad, to a commission of importance that would bring both cash and credit from. . . . I mention no names. . . . from a high quarter? There might be such a thing to be had, and old Laudadio Benincasa might be one who possibly would have something to say in the matter. Eh!”

“Oh! Signor Laudadio!”

“Well! Basta! I have said nothing. But come to the old place, and ask Beppina how she does, and we’ll talk. Good night.”

“To-morrow evening, then. Good night, my kind friend!”

“And I say, Pippo, a little word in your

ear!" added the old gentleman, turning and limping up to Pippo.

"When one speaks of high quarters, nothing is to be done without an unblemished morality, you understand me. Young men will be young men. But there must be no scandal. Basta!"

And, so saying, he turned and hobbled off across the moonlit space, between the marble steps of the vast front of the church and the baptistery, in the direction of the *cereria*.

Pippo turned, too, towards his home, meditating much on all that had fallen from his former friend and protector.

The old wax-chandler's advance to seek a reconciliation was a very good sign—a *very* good sign indeed! He was one of those men who have an instinctive sense of coming good fortune, and whose adhesion is a prediction of it, which goes far to insure its own verification. Then his hints of possible patronage. High quarters! Could he mean

the court? It was not impossible. Then his mention of Beppina—a shade more, it seemed to Pippo, than had been absolutely necessary; and that parting shot about morality—evidently alluding to poor Tina—of course there was much to think of in all this.

And Pippo strolled slowly towards the *Via dell' Amore*, much musing on the various hopes and possibilities which the talk of old Laudadio had caused to flit before his mind. “The cautious old sacristy-haunter,” said he to himself, “is not a man to ‘throw words into the air,’ as the Tuscan phrases mere meaningless talking. He means something—evidently has some scheme in view. Any way, it is clear the old fellow thinks it worth his while to make up to me. A shrewd judge is old Laudadio! At all events, I shall not fail to go and have a look at the old place to-morrow evening, and see how the land lies. I wonder what Beppina looks like now!”

And with these thoughts in his head the young artist came out from the deep shade of the narrow *Via del Melarancio* into the broad moonlight of the *Piazza Vecchia* in the immediate neighbourhood of his home, and saw two men coming towards him across the piazza. A few more steps enabled him to recognize our old acquaintance Tito Fanetti and his brother-in-law, Signor Tanari the picture-dealer.

“It’s lucky we have met you,” cried Tito, “we’ve been to the studio to look for you. And there is La Beata sitting in the cold waiting for you all alone in that great barn of a place, with her knitting and a little glimmer of one wick of a *lumino*!* *La poveretta*! We did not say a word to her of the matter in hand.”

* A *lumino*, in contradistinction to *lampione*, a lamp, is one of those tall classical-shaped brass lamps, so common throughout Tuscany, carrying three or four burners with one small wick each, on a long slender shaft, exceedingly picturesque, but not good for much in any other way.

“And what the devil is the matter in hand?” demanded Pippo in much surprise.

“An unpleasant matter enough!” returned the other. “What on earth is this we hear about her going to that Englishman, up on the Pitti,* to sit to his daughter?”

“What do you mean?” cried Pippo, angrily; “why the devil should she not go? The Englishman proposed it. I should never have dreamed of such a thing.”

“But, Signor Pippo,” said Tanari gravely, “you gave this Signor Patringham to understand that La Beata was your wife; and everybody knows how rigid these English people are respecting such matters.”

“I!” cried Pippo; “who says so? I never told him anything of the kind. I should never have dreamed of speaking on the subject. And what business is it of anybody’s whether she is my wife or not?”

* *Sui Pitti*, the common Florentine designation for the houses opposite the palace in the Piazza Pitti.

“None at all, my dear fellow,” said Tito, “as long as she is in your house; but when she is to be introduced into the houses of other people . . . it seems to me”

“But surely,” said Signor Tanari, “you must have given him to understand that you were married.”

“I tell you I never uttered a word upon the subject in any way,” rejoined Pippo. “He asked me something or other, I hardly know what, rather impertinently I thought, about her being a proper conducted person. I suppose he was afraid she would steal his daughter’s handkerchiefs!”

“Pooh! pooh!” said Signor Tanari. “One can see there has been a misunderstanding. But now the fact is, that the thing won’t do, anyhow. You don’t know these *milordi Inglesi*. I do. There would be no end of a row if La Beata, *poveretta*, were to go into his house, he fancying that he had been told that she was a married

woman, and then he were to find out that the case was different. Excuse me, Signor Pippo, if I tell you that it cannot be. I introduced you to Signor Patringham. He is one of the best customers I have, and I would not for a thousand scudi that he should think he had been used, as he would think if this were done. I don't speak of you, yourself. But just think whether it would be wise to give such an offence to a man who seems inclined to be of so much service to you."

"Of course Pippo won't think of it," struck in Tito. "It's deuced lucky we heard of it in time."

"But what am I to do?" rejoined Pippo, who was not the least disposed to risk any quarrel with his new patron; "Tina was to go there to-morrow. What can I say to him?"

"I'll tell you what," said Tito, "you must say that she is ill. Poveretta! I am sure

to look at her sitting there all alone in the dark and cold, it would be likely enough that she should be. Send in the morning to say that she is ill, and cannot come. That will put it off for a while, and we can find some remedy or other. Probably they will get another model in the mean time."

"Well," replied Pippo after a moment's pause, "that's what it must be, I suppose. I must send in the morning."

And with that the trio separated, and Pippo turned up the *Via dell' Amore*, with a fresh set of thoughts added to those which had been before occupying his mind; but which he seemed indistinctly to feel had a tendency in them pointing in a similar direction.

CHAPTER IX.

DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE FOR SAINTS
AND ARTISTS.

It was late by the the time Pippo got home, very late for the habits to which La Beata had been accustomed. But he found her, as Tito had told him, patiently waiting for his return, and looking forward to her little reflected gleam of sunshine in his joyous spirits, and triumphant reports of the tokens of his coming prosperity,—what this artist of repute had said to him, the compliments that others had paid him, &c. The short quarter of an hour during which all this was retailed to her of an evening by Pippo, when he came home from the café, was the bright

spot in her day, and the reward for the long dreary hours of vigil by which it was preceded.

She was sitting, when he entered, in the far part of the huge room close under the great window, from which the bright white moonlight was streaming in. As soon as the moon had risen high enough to shine into this window, she had put out her little lamp as a measure of economy, for the olive oil universally burned in Tuscany is an expensive article; and the quantity saved by leaving the moon to do its office might suffice for the salad for the morrow's meal. As she sat there motionless, while her thoughts flitted from the somewhat alarming engagement to be fulfilled on the next day, to castle-building fancies respecting her own and Pippo's future, but with her ear unconsciously on the watch the while for his expected footstep on the stair, there was an airy tenuity of outline about the slender white-

robed figure, ghostly pale in the pale white light, that so perfectly represented the idea poetical fancy is wont to form of a disembodied spirit, as to have startled any one entering the chamber with a frame of mind at all attuned to such imaginings.

Pippo's mind as he came in was busied, however, with thoughts of a very different order. *La Beata* started up to meet him, and instantly perceived that something was amiss. Instead of the joyous noisy good-humour with which he had latterly been wont to come home full of the little café triumphs of the evening, there was a heavy frown on his brow, and he was strangely sparing of words.

"What is it, Pippo mio?" asked Tina, tenderly. "Something has gone wrong! Something has vexed you, Pippo!"

"Gone wrong!" cried Pippo throwing himself on the old sofa; "things always do go wrong, when people I'll tell you

what it is, Tina, you are not looking well ! You are not strong, and if you won't think for yourself, others must think for you."

La Beata was utterly amazed at this entirely new notion. It had never occurred to Pippo to fancy her ill before, or to take any special heed to her health. And now there was more of discontent and almost displeasure in his manner than of any appearance of affectionate solicitude.

"My own dear Pippo !" said she, "what has put such a notion into your head ? I am quite as well as usual, trust me I am."

"I tell you that your look does not please me. You have been changing for the worse for some time past. Perhaps this cold barn of a place does not agree with you. I am sure you are not well ; and I don't think you are in a fit state to take the fatigue of going out to sit for these English people."

"But we have promised, have we not ? I must go. And believe me, Pippo dear,

you have taken a notion into your head without any reason. Trust me, my own, I am just the same as I always am. I have nothing the matter with me."

"But I won't trust you at all upon the subject, Tina. I think you are not strong enough to undertake this job. I don't choose you to do it. And I shall write to-morrow to Mr. Pattingham to tell him that you are not in health to justify your waiting on his daughter."

Tina was utterly astounded, and could not help feeling persuaded that there was something behind which Pippo did not think fit to tell her. But this last declaration of his sovereign will on the subject was decisive. And Tina would as soon have thought of rebelling against fate as against his will and pleasure. As far as her own little private preference was concerned, she was not sorry to escape from a duty which her shyness made painful to her. And had it not been

that she was haunted by a feeling that the real truth of the matter had not been told her, and that something evil or disagreeable had happened to cause this sudden change in Pippo's plans, she would have been well contented with his decision. As it was, she could only acquiesce and declare her readiness to be ruled by him in all things.

The next morning when Pippo sat down to write his note to Mr. Patringham, an unforeseen difficulty presented itself before him. It was absolutely necessary to speak of *La Beata* by name. By what name, style, or title should he speak of her? The Englishman conceived that he had been told that she was his wife. Was it possible so to write as to leave this to be supposed, without absolutely saying as much in words? He could find no way of doing this. Every phrase that he could think of, short of writing "my wife" or "Sig^a Lonari" seemed clearly to lead to a suspicion of the truth. And the

first of all necessities was to avoid incurring the displeasure of Mr. Patringham. Then he reflected that in any case it would be necessary to avoid any further meeting at any time between La Beata and the Patringham family. The mistake, as he called it to himself, need never be found out at all. So at last he decided on writing that he was very sorry to say that *his wife* was very unwell, and that the state of her health must unfortunately prevent her from availing herself of Mr. Patringham's kind proposal.

La Beata had observed the length of time and consideration which this note had cost Pippo ; as also that he sealed and carried it down stairs to find some means of sending it, without either showing it to her, or making any observation as to its contents. And it was impossible but that those unusual circumstances should add to the mystification and misgiving which oppressed her. Shortly after sending his note, and again impressing

on her the fact that she was very unwell, Pippo went out, and she was left to her knitting and solitary meditations.

Pippo wished on his part to indulge also in meditations, which could, he felt, be more freely pursued elsewhere than in his home, in company with La Beata.

What a providential mercy it was, that he had been warned in time of the scrape he was on the point of getting into with Mr. Patringham! It might have ruined all his hopes. What queer people they must be, these English *milordi*! What the devil could it matter to them on what terms he and La Beata lived together? But what would one have? It was their way of thinking. And seeing that they and those like them were the people who could make or mar one's fortunes, it was necessary to fall in with their prejudices. Then his thoughts reverted to old Laudadio and the conversation of the preceding evening. What, if the old man

were really beginning to think that he might find a worse son-in-law than the rising artist? What, if Beppina really had thought of him and their old playfellow days more than he had ever thought of her? These were golden visions, indeed! And it seemed that there was nothing very improbable in them. It was evident, at all events, that the old wax-chandler meant to take him by the hand. But then it must be adieu, once for all, to “*La Bohême*” and its ways and associations. Landadio Benincasa’s son-in-law must be a respectable and respected citizen. And then he saw himself, in imagination, installed in that very desirable and worshipful position. He should continue to work at his profession, of course—but it would be more for love of art than for profit. He would from time to time produce a great picture, which should set all Florence talking; and might perhaps be induced to execute some work occasionally for English

or American amateurs, who would strive to tempt him by fabulous prices to undertake commissions for them. The first floor of the old palace over the *cereria* would make a charming residence. The light in the rooms on the garden front was all that could be desired. But those banking people who rented it. Had they a lease? That was the principal question.

And then as he was crossing the south-east corner of the cathedral piazza towards the *Via del Proconsolo*, immersed in these thoughts, the course of them was broken by the passing of a "Misericordia" procession, which was defiling from out of the "Via Buia" * into the piazza.

Few persons can have ever visited Florence without having seen and been struck by these dismally funereal processions traversing the streets on their errands of mercy.

* Or Dark street; so called from its narrowness. It opens into the Piazza del Duomo, at right angles with the Via del Proconsolo.

The "Misericordia" is a brotherhood, consisting of Florentines of all ranks and professions, vowed to the ministering to and relieving certain forms of distress and calamity. It dates from the 13th century, and has ever been one of the most unexceptionable forms in which the spirit of Roman Catholic charity has manifested itself. The office which the Society principally proposed to itself to undertake, at the time of its foundation five hundred years ago, was the burial of the dead. It arose from the urgent need that existed for some more efficient means to this end. The most destructive of all the great pestilences which desolated Florence again and again during the middle ages was then raging, and the dead were lying unburied in the streets of the city. Those whose office it was to bury them in normal times, had themselves fallen victims to the pestilence; and the duty of handling or even approaching the decomposing bodies was a

fearfully perilous one. It was under these circumstances that the "Arch-confraternity of the Misericordia" was instituted. But in process of time, as the better organization of society has rendered this especial "act of mercy" unnecessary, the task which the brotherhood now chiefly propose to themselves is the immediate attendance on the spot where any accident or sudden stroke of illness has occurred, and the transport of the sufferer to the hospital, or to his home, as the case may require, in their litters borne on the shoulders of six or eight of the brethren. They also attend, whenever summoned, to transport the sick, when necessary, from their homes to the hospitals. And this latter form of assistance is that which they are in these days most frequently called on to render. Notice is sent to their office, head-quarters, or oratory—for the place partakes of the nature of all these,—which is situated on the south side of the cathedral

piazza, to the effect that the services of the Misericordia are needed in such or such a house in any part of the city. A large deep-toned bell, whose boding boom is well known to all dwellers in Florence, is immediately tolled to call those of the brethren who are "on the roster" for that week. One toll of the bell announces a call for the transport of a sick person to the hospital. Two strokes tell that an accident, such as a broken limb, or other, has occurred; and three that a sudden death in some place, requiring immediate removal of the dead, has happened. But the especial characteristic and peculiarity of this ancient brotherhood is the care that is taken to provide against the good deeds done by its members being "seen of men." Each member, when, on hearing the fatal bell, he hurries to the place of rendezvous above mentioned, finds there ready for him a black linen gown, which descends to his feet, and a black peaked hood, with two

holes in it for the eyes to look through, which he forthwith puts on, and becomes at once irre recognizable by his most intimate acquaintance. The black figures, some twelve or twenty in number, form themselves silently into procession, lift on the shoulders of six or eight among them a covered litter all black like themselves, and proceed in complete silence to the place where their services are required. And every hat is doffed, even by those who treat other ecclesiastical personages and corporations with scant reverence, as the funereal looking procession passes; and every carriage draws aside to leave the way clear for the bearers of aid and consolation to the wretched. For the brotherhood of the "Misericordia" has in all ages stood very high in the good opinion of Florentines; and to be a member of it is an undoubted mark of respectability, and passport to consideration.

Pippo faced towards the procession, and

lifted his hat respectfully as it passed; and the thought struck him, as he did so:—Why should not I become a member of the Misericordia? One ought to do some good in the world. It would be exactly the thing to please old Laudadio; just the very thing to indicate an intention of reforming oneself, and becoming a steady and respected member of society. I will speak to him about it this evening.

And with this thought in his head Pippo pursued his way down the *Via del Proconsolo* till he came to the corner at which the Corso falls into it. He turned up the latter street, and, slowly strolling along the north side of it, turned into the shop of Beppo Vanni the colourman, which, it will be remembered, was just opposite the apartment in which the widow Leti and her daughter had lived and carried on their business of artificial flower making.

Old Vanni was not in the shop himself;

but Pippo, who, like most of the artists in Florence, was more or less known there, entered into some trivial talk with the shopman, and presently asked who was living in the rooms opposite which had been inhabited by the widow Leti some years ago, and if the same trade was still carried on there.

He was told that another lone widow had succeeded to La *Vedova* Leti, and that, as he had supposed likely, she was engaged in the same business. It is frequently the case that when the tenant of an apartment in which any trade has been long carried on vacates it by death or otherwise, the dwelling is let to some other follower of the same calling, anxious to profit by the connection which may adhere to the locality. In reply to further inquiries, he further learned that the woman's name was Marta Sappi, and that she lived entirely alone.

Having ascertained these facts, he left the shop, and continued his stroll more deeply immersed in thought than ever.

Pippo, to do him justice, had been and was an industrious labourer at his easel. His habit was to spend the entire morning in his studio, while La Beata busied herself about the duties of their little household, sat to Pippo as a model, sallied forth, basket on arm, to make any small purchases which might be required, or finally indulged in her chief pleasure of sitting with her knitting in her hand by the side of his easel, and chatting of the progress and hopes and fears connected with the work in hand. On the day in question, however, he did not return home, but spent the entire day after his visit to the shop in the Corso in lounging from one to another of the studios of his acquaintances. Between four and five he joined two or three of these who were going to dine at a modest eating-house, and it was not till near seven, and long after it was dark at that season, that he returned to his studio.

“Oh! Pippo! where have you been? Thank God you are come home at last!

What has happened to keep you out all day?" burst out poor Tina, when he entered the door. She had not lit any lamp, but had been walking up and down the huge nearly dark room ever since she could no longer see to do her knitting.

"Why should anything special have happened?" returned Pippo, in no very kind tone of voice. "I had business to attend to. You can't suppose that things are to go on for ever as they have done. It is absolutely necessary that I should show myself a little in the world. Many things that suited me well enough when I was a poor devil, whose existence was known only to two or three thieves of picture-dealers, won't do now that I have a footing in quite a different world. I don't know that I shall stay in this barn of a place."

"Caro mio! it is such a beautiful light for work here! Do you think that we shall get anything that will suit us as well? We

have been very, very happy here, Pippo mio!" And there was an unacknowledged something at her heart, that made her voice full of tears, as she remembered this happiness. "But you know best, dear Pippo," she added, "and will do what is best, as you always do."

"Happy! yes! I am sure I have done my best to make you happy, Tina, while we have lived together here. But one cannot always think of happiness. One must think of duty also sometimes. Now, I am going to see Signor Laudadio on business, and must make myself a little decent. Where are my things?"

"But have you eaten, Pippo?" she said, as she hastened to light a lamp. "Had you not better have something to eat before going out?"

"I have dined, of course," said he, snappishly, "and I suppose you have too!"

"I, Pippo! without you!" cried poor Tina, more and more amazed at every fresh mani-

festation of what seemed to her a total revolution in her little world. "I waited for you."

"Upon my soul one would think you wanted to vex one! Surely you might have guessed that I was kept from coming home!" said he.

It was with difficulty that she could restrain herself from bursting into tears; but her utter bewilderment prevented her mind from realizing at once the whole weight of the misery involved in the harsh unkindness of his manner. But all this time she was active in helping him to make his toilette, taking his clothes from the drawers, brushing the smallest speck of dust from the carefully laid up best coat, and busy about all those numberless and nameless little feminine cares and offices which are so far more efficient to the end in view, and so infinitely more agreeable in the ministering of them, than the service of the best-drilled valet that ever brushed a coat.

So entire and unreserved had been La Beata's belief and faith that the connection between her and Pippo was necessarily and indefeasibly one for life, indissoluble by the very nature of things—so completely did she still regard it as such—that no sentiment of jealousy had ever entered her heart. She would as easily have imagined that mischief and danger might arise from her being in company with other men, as have conceived the idea that harm could come to her from his associating with other women. It is surely a mistake to consider jealousy as between man and woman a sentiment special in its kind and universally implanted in human nature. It is only a fear, generated, like all other fears, by the observation of dangers seen to be real in the world around us, and would disappear from the human mind as the occurrence in the world of the evils feared should become rare. In the mean time, each married man or woman is

free from the scourge in very fair proportion to the elevation and justice of their conception of the marriage tie.

La Beata had never felt jealousy. Had the sentiment been known to her, it might have occurred to her to guess that Pippo would hardly have been as anxious as he evidently was about his toilette, had old Laudadio been the sole object of his visit. Assuredly a woman in her position, a little wiser in the world's bad teaching, would not have put the finishing stroke to her work by making him sit down while she retraced the parting in his hair, and carefully arranged the handsome abundance of black curling locks to the best advantage.

Poor guileless little Tina! *Poor*, as we say, not perhaps without a touch of contempt in our compassion; yet how infinitely rich, come what come might, in her incapability of conceiving the fate which threatened her!

So Pippo went forth, armed for conquest, to fulfil his engagement at the *cereria*.

He found Signor Laudadio sitting in a little glazed box, partitioned off one corner of the immense shop, in deep conference with a priest, whose spruce neatness contrasted with the rusty shabbiness of the wealthy old trader very strikingly. He got up to go when Pippo made his appearance, and Signor Laudadio, merely giving the latter a nod of welcome, obsequiously limped by the side of him across the wide floor of the shop to the door. Arrived there, the priest took him by the button, and they remained on the door-step talking in low voices for a long while, as Tuscans will, appearing never able to bring their talking to an end. At last, slightly touching his huge glossy three-cornered hat in return for old Laudadio's reverential bow, the smart ecclesiastic walked off, and the wax-chandler turned to receive his other visitor.

“Good evening, Sor’ Pippo! You’ll excuse me if I did not welcome you before; you saw how I was engaged. Do you know his reverence? No! Ah, well! perhaps you may some day. That is the sort of people, Signor Pippo, whom it is good to know.”

“To be sure! To whom do you say so, my good sir? * To stand well in such quarters is just what is needed to a rising man in my position. But who is he?”

“Ay! ay! Who is he? and what could such a one as he have to talk about for a good half-hour with old Laudadio Benincasa? All in good time, my young friend! all in good time! But now come in, and see Beppina, and have a spell of chat.”

And so saying he led the way, pounding the brick floor sonorously with his stick as

* A common Florentine phrase, meaning, “there is no need to tell me, who am well persuaded of it.” It is a strong form of assent.

he went, through a door of communication with the dwelling-rooms behind the shop and warehouse. The large and well proportioned chamber to which he brought his visitor was a very pretty one in summer, when the large windows communicating with the garden beyond it were open. But now that these were closed and curtainless, it had, to English eyes at least, a somewhat bare and bleak appearance. There was no fireplace; and the handsomely painted and varnished brick floor was uncovered save by three or four little squares of carpet, one before the music-stool in front of a grand piano, and the others before three or four large chairs placed in a semicircle facing a huge old-fashioned sofa with its back to the wall. On a large and handsome console with richly carved gilt legs, and a magnificent slab of *giallo antico* marble, surmounted by an immense mirror in a splendidly carved gilt frame, on the opposite side of the room,

was symmetrically ranged a tea service of gaudily painted, but very ordinary French porcelain, with its tall square-shaped teapot in the centre. The superb piece of furniture had been placed there some century and a half ago probably by the then owners of the palace; while the tea-things were the contribution of Signor Laudadio himself; and the contrast between the console and its burthen was not greater than that between the former and present masters of the house. In the centre of the room there was a marble table with a large lamp in the middle of it. This, however, was not lighted; its office being performed by a couple of the tall brass lamps described on a former occasion, one on the pianoforte, and the other brought in with him by the old wax-chandler. There were some loose sheets of music on the piano, but no other book of any sort, or any token of domestic occupation whatever. On the walls were a few tolerable old pictures

of sacred subjects, interspersed with several intolerable framed French lithographs of battles. In the middle of the great sofa sat Beppina yawning, but very patiently and very evidently awaiting the expected visitor, and far too simple and unsophisticated to make any attempt at pretending to be doing anything else besides waiting for him.

“Eccolo!” cried the old man as he entered; “here he is, Beppina! This is the gentleman who sells his pictures before they are off the easel, and has carriages full of English ladies at the door of his studio.”

“Good evening, Signor Pippo,” said Beppina; “truly it is a pleasure to see you again. You won’t find things so much changed here as they tell me they are with you.”

“But to me it seems that the change is at least as great here,” said Pippo, with a very plain-speaking look of admiration at the young lady. She understood the im-

plied compliment perfectly well, and smiled with pleasure, not the least caring to appear unconscious of his meaning.

“It pleases you to say so,” she replied; “*ma che!** I am just what I always was.”

“Always the same charming little personage, no doubt. But in truth without compliment, Signora Beppina, you have reason to be content with the years that have changed a pretty child into a very lovely woman.”

And Pippo’s very plain-spoken homage said nothing more than the truth, and nothing that was inconsistent with the simple and unaffected Italian ideas of what is permissible in such cases.

Beppina had, in fact, grown into a very pretty girl. She was a bright richly-coloured little brunette, with brilliant black eyes sparkling with vivacity and good

* Literally “but, what!” a constantly recurring exclamation in Tuscan conversation.

humour. Her small person was a little inclined to *embonpoint*, but not more so as yet than to give that idea of rounded, soft, dimpled, partridge-like plumpness, which to some eyes is the perfection of youthful beauty. Pretty little small-boned well-fleshed hands and feet, a thoroughly good-natured mouth almost always dimpled with smiles, and showing a brilliant set of white little teeth, made up a very complete specimen of the “*beauté du diable*” description.

“But you! you have changed into a great man, they tell me. It seems to me, too, that I see some alteration hereabouts,” she added with a laugh in her eye, putting her finger on her chin. “Does the talent grow with the beard, Signor Pippo? It would seem so; and in that case you must have plenty.”

“Do you dislike beards, Signora Bepina?”

“I did not say that. But you, you know

Signor Pippo, had no right to have any at all. I am afraid yours came together with all sorts of bad courses."

"But he has left all those behind now," struck in old Laudadio. "It seems he has taken the path the saints marked out for him, since it is leading apparently to a good result. And henceforth, at all events, he intends to live respectably."

"Indeed, that is my notion," said Pippo, rather naïvely, speaking of it as a new idea, which he had never yet tried; "and that puts me in mind of a matter I wanted to speak to you about, my dear sir. I have been thinking that I should like to become a member of the Misericordia. It is a very holy work, . . . and there is nothing more respectable."

"Bravo, my dear Pippo! bravo, in truth!" cried the old gentleman, much delighted; "it is a most excellent idea. There are many indulgences to be enjoyed;

and, as you say, it gives a man a certain character”

“Perhaps then, you, Signor Laudadio, could manage”

“Don’t say another word, my dear boy. It shall be done. We’ll put all that in the right way at once. I am very glad you have determined on so thoroughly desirable a step. And it encourages me,” he continued, after a pause of consideration, “to speak to you at once of another matter, which I had in my head, but which I had intended to put off till in short, without beating the bush about it, till I saw whether you were really going to take the right end of the thread to unravel the skein, Sor’ Pippo. You won’t take it amiss; but what I was thinking of would do only for somebody standing well in certain quarters, you understand me.”

Pippo did understand in a general way that something advantageous might be within

his reach, provided he could give sufficient assurances of his intention henceforth to rank himself unmistakeably among the "right-thinking" members of Florentine society. He must become visibly and decidedly "respectable." And it must be understood, that much more, or rather something very different, was meant by this in the Florentine world of that day than the words imply in their simple English sense. Right-thinking respectability involved the profession of a whole system of political and religious faith. It was to be the known adherent of the established order of things in Church and State, and the friend of those for whose advantage that order existed. Older men than any who are likely to be among the readers of these pages can remember a time, happily now passed away for ever, when the same phrases had a very similar meaning among ourselves. Nobody in Florence, at the time referred to, understood

them in any other sense. And of course one of the mischievous results of such a social code was to cause the easy toleration of much that was really evil among the large class shut out from respectability by this arbitrary definition of it, while a second was seen in a very evident tendency among those who were "respectable," by virtue of their opinions, to wink at the shortcomings of their friends in matters which would have excluded them from a class truly respectable by virtue of conduct. Of course, also, the "good things" of the world, in a state of society such as that described, fall to the lot of the "right thinkers;" and men who have a vigorous and vivid perception of the side on which their bread is buttered, and a less clear recognition of some other matters, are apt at a certain period of their lives to recognize the expediency of assuming the livery of respectability and forswearing sack, at least in public.

This was the desirable state of mind of which the eminently respectable wax-chandler was anxious to assure himself in his young friend ; for it so happened that by means of the working of some of those indirect and unavowed influences, which have been described as so rife in the conduct of the social operations which in Catholic countries engage a large portion of the attention of his friends and patrons the priests, Signor Laudadio Benincasa had it in his power, if not absolutely to dispose of, at least to influence very decisively the disposition of an extremely important commission to some fortunate artist. But it was necessary, at the same time, that he should be careful not to compromise his own credit by the recommendation of any but a thoroughly "right-thinking" candidate.

The case was this. It had occurred to "a very exalted lady," as newspaper paragraphs say, to establish and bring into vogue

at Florence a "new religion." Protestant readers must not suppose that any fundamental change in doctrine is implied in so startling a project. In Roman Catholic phrase, the Franciscan order, when it was first founded, was a "new religion," or new rule of observance. And the scheme which the exalted lady was bent on merely consisted in bringing forward to notice a previously obscure saint, and getting up (under distinguished patronage) a new special devotion with liturgical ceremonies, processions, anniversary days, confraternities, and all complete—a very pleasing resource for an exalted lady hard pressed to find some scope for her unemployed activity. But for these pious purposes a visible and attractive presentment of the newly-promoted saint is indispensable. The new religion must be introduced to its devotees in a grand procession, in which the saint's banner must be borne aloft adorned with his or her portrait

of life-like size and attractive aspect. Now, Saint Filomena was the fortunate saint, whom the . . . exalted lady, upon this occasion, delighted to honour. And, accordingly, a portrait of St. Filomena, to be carried in procession on the first day of inauguration of the new devotion, was needed. And this was the commission which Signor Laudadio Benincasa the wax-chandler thought he could find the means of putting into the hands of any protégé of his own who might be a worthy recipient of such high patronage. And it is easy to understand that the profits of such a commission would not be confined to the mere price to be paid for the picture wanted, but would be the means, in all probability, of introducing the fortunate artist to persons and places likely in many ways to prove stepping-stones on the road to fortune.

All this old Laudadio proceeded to unfold to his attentive listener with many reticences, winks, and shrugs, reiterated injunctions of

the discreetest silence, and no little self-importance. To all which Pippo his ear most seriously did incline. He perfectly comprehended the whole matter before the old wax-chandler had got a quarter through his hints and roundabout explanations, and was fully alive to all the advantages that might accrue to him from carrying out the idea. He was very much persuaded, too, that the far more important prize of Bep-pina's hand might depend upon his success or failure in obtaining this commission. He perfectly well knew all the importance which her father would attach to a connection which might bring him, however remotely and indirectly, into contact with the small charmed circle in which the exalted lady aforesaid lived and moved. And he was, finally, fully aware of the sort of man it was necessary to appear to merit the patronage proposed to him.

In short, the old man and the young one

perfectly understood each other. And when they parted, after a cordial invitation to return and see them another evening, "when they might talk of something else besides business all the time," as Beppina said, had been given by her and accepted by Pippo, it was agreed that Signor Laudadio should put all his wheels into motion for the attainment of the end in view, and that the artist should on his part neglect nothing which could help to render him worthy of the "most distinguished patronage."

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN TO THE OLD HOME.

IT was again late before Pippo reached his home. He had not returned thither immediately on leaving the *cereria*, but had spent an hour or more in sauntering slowly up and down the *Lungarno*, meditating deeply on various matters, which he felt he could debate with himself more freely in solitude than with La Beata at his elbow, and beneath the roof-tree of their common home.

When at length he entered the studio, he found La Beata again waiting for him, as on the preceding evening. But she had fallen into so deep a sleep on her chair, that the

noise of his entrance failed to wake her. In fact she was utterly exhausted. What with the unwonted vigil of the previous night, the harassing and painful ponderings and misgivings which had occupied her mind all the day, and, above all, her state of inanition from absolute want of food, she was in a fair way to be really as ill as Pippo had insisted on making her out to be when he decided that she should not fulfil her engagement to Mr. Patringham. He would have been truly shocked had it occurred to him to guess the last of these causes of her exhaustion. When he had been vexed at finding that she had fasted while he had been dining at the eating-house, and, wholly absorbed in his preparations for his evening visit, had left her without saying anything further on the subject, he supposed—if he can be said to have supposed anything on a subject on which his mind had never rested for a moment—that of course she would take some food as soon

as he was gone. At all events his thought on the matter had not gone to the extent of reminding him that there was no article of food of any sort in the house, and that poor Tina was absolutely without the means of procuring any. Perhaps he might have had some reason to find fault with her for not having reminded him of these facts; but in truth it was from no shadow of an idea of "playing victim" that she had omitted to do so. It was simply that her mind had been too thoroughly filled with other, and, despite the urgency of her bodily need, more engrossing thoughts. She had remembered nothing more about her fasting condition, when he had left her; but Nature had not forgotten to exact the penalty of neglecting her requirements.

"What, Tina! not gone to bed!" said he, crossing the room and laying his hand on her shoulder. "It would have been better to sleep in bed than on the chair, wouldn't it?"

“Pippo dearest! I am glad you have come! I don’t know how I fell asleep. Is it late?” she said, rousing herself, and rising from her chair. “I am afraid I am not quite well, Pippo!” she added, putting her shaking little thin hand on his arm; “my head goes round, and my legs seem to give way under me. Help me to bed, Pippo, my own love!”

Pippo perhaps felt at that moment that a certain amount of “firmness” is sometimes needed for the operation of “getting off with the old love before one gets on with the new.” He had, however, sufficient presence of mind—a fine quality, as all the world knows—to turn poor Tina’s confession of illness to immediate use for the furtherance of the business in hand.

“Well! I told you you were not well! I knew it was so this morning. This great cold garret don’t do for you. I meant to have spoken to you to-night, Tina, about . . . several matters I have been thinking of.

But you are too ill now. Let us hope you will feel better to-morrow morning."

"I shall be quite well by to-morrow morning, Pippo, dear!" she said. "But let me get to bed now."

The next morning, "Nature's sweet restorer" had in some degree done its usual work. *La Beata* did feel better. But as still an exceeding sense of fatigue and languor was heavy on her, she decided on remaining in bed a few hours later than usual; and Pippo brought her a roll and some coffee to her bedside. Just as she had taken this breakfast, and was declaring that she felt so much the better for it that she would get up, there came a ring at the door of the studio; and Pippo, on going to see who was there, found the same servant in livery who had before accompanied the *Patringham* carriage.

He brought a note from Mr. *Patringham* to Signor *Lonari*, expressing the concern of

that gentleman and his family at Signora Lonari's indisposition, and offering, on the part of Mrs. Patringham, a visit to the invalid, if she could be of any service or comfort to her. Miss Patringham would not think, the note said, of attempting to supply the place of Signora Lonari, being sure that she should find no one who would please her so well; and they all trusted that in a few days Signora Lonari would be sufficiently recovered to permit of her carrying out the proposed sittings, which should be managed, Mr. Patringham begged to assure Signor Lonari, with every regard to his wife's delicate health.

“What a piece of good luck that the door had not been opened to the servant by La Beata going about as well as usual;—as would have been the case yesterday, or an hour or two later to-day!”

That was the first thought that rushed through Pippo's mind. The second reverted to the answer to be returned to the note.

It was a disagreeable note to write. There was again the necessity of alluding to La Beata as his wife, which he had been so reluctant to do in writing on the former occasion. Then the suggested visit had to be decisively avoided. And in the third place, it was necessary to hold out as little expectation as possible that La Beata would at any future time be able to fulfil her engagement.

“Where’s the ink, Tina?” he called out to her in the inner room, or rather the enclosed corner of the large room; “I must write a note to these people,—the English family. They still want you to go to them. I wish people would take No for an answer. I must tell them that you are ill in bed.”

“You will find the ink on a ledge of the large window, dear. But, Pippo dearest, I feel quite well now. Would it not be better to say that I will go to them to-morrow, if that will suit?”

“A pretty thing! and you lying there

in your bed ! What the deuce makes you so eager to go gadding after these English people, I wonder ?”

Poor Tina was, in truth, very far from eager to do anything of the kind. She was only anxious that a scheme by which it was proposed that she should contribute something to the common stock, should not be thrown up on a mistaken notion that she was unable to undertake it.

“It’s only that I am quite able to earn the money, dear Pippo. We should be very glad of it, *caro mio*.”

“I’ll write what’s best,” said he ; and sitting down, he produced, after some meditation and several corrections, the following letter.

“Most illustrious Sir,*

“The invalid for whom you have so

* The ordinary Italian style of address to one with whom the writer is but slightly acquainted, or to one somewhat superior to the writer in social position.

kindly inquired is, I am sorry to say, still very unwell, so much so as, I fear, to leave little hope that she should be able to think for a long while to come of any such engagement as that you were kind enough to propose to her. If she does not accept the very condescending offer of your most amiable lady to visit her, I beg you to believe that it is not because she is insensible to the kindness of it. But, thank God! she is sufficiently well cared for by those on whom such duty naturally falls—(*a chi spetta tal ufficio*, were the words);—and it is, moreover, probable, that she will not remain where, as must have been but too visible to you when you honoured me with a visit, there are small means of affording her the comfort her delicate health renders necessary for her.

“Repeating therefore, most illustrious Sir, the expression of my thanks for the kindness which has prompted your letter, I conclude

by declaring myself, with sentiments of the profoundest respect,

“Your most devoted servant,

“FILIPPO LONARI,

“Painter.

“No. 3497. Via dell’ Amore. 3rd floor.”

As soon as Mr. Patringham’s servant had departed with this letter, fairly copied out, sealed with a magnificent coat of arms from a huge seal ring on Pippo’s finger, and addressed—

“Alla Sua Eccellenza

L’Illustrissimo Signore

Il Sig^{re} Conte Patringham,

Città,”

Pippo asked La Beata if she felt able to get up; and on her declaring that she now felt perfectly well, he said that he must go out on business, and should be back in an hour, when he should hope to find her dressed.

So saying he took his hat, and walked again, as the day before, in the direction of

the *Via del Corso*. He did not go the shortest way thither, however, but strolled all round the cathedral, with his eyes on the pavement, and apparently in deep thought. At last he came to the destination he had been in so little haste to reach; and this time entered not the colour-shop but the door opposite; and, climbing to the second story, asked if the widow Sappi lived there.

“Here! at your service, sir,” said an emaciated and poverty-stricken but cleanly looking woman past middle age.

“You are the Signora Sappi? If you will permit me, I want to speak on a matter of business with you a few minutes,—a small affair, which perhaps may be of advantage to you. I am Filippo Lonari, painter. You may have heard my name.”

“Oh! yes, sir; I know your name,” said the little woman, as she led the way into her room, and swept an apron full of the materials of her trade off a chair, that she

might offer it to her visitor. The *vedova* Sappi had, in fact, heard of Pippo Lonari not as the successful and rising artist of that name, but as the "*damo*" of Nunziatina Leti, the daughter of her predecessor in the room and business. And Signora Sappi already had a shrewd idea of the nature of the business on which the young artist had come to her; for she had lived more than fifty years in the world, and had competent experience of some at least of the ways of it.

"You carry on the flower-making trade, as the widow Leti did," said Pippo, sitting down; "one can live by it; but not over well, I am afraid."

"Yes! one lives, Signor, as you see. But as for well! Holy Virgin! It is a hard struggle to live at all!"

"You are all alone, you see, Signora Sappi; and that makes the matter worse for you than it was for Signora Leti, poor

soul! Now listen. I will tell you in two words what I have come to say to you. I dare say you know that La Nunziatina Leti and I have been together since the death of her mother. She is an angel, *poveretta*! truly one of God's angels. And it breaks my heart to see that she is ill off at that great barn of a studio of mine. She is delicate, and it don't suit her, poor little thing. Now you know most likely, before I tell you, that she was the main support of the old woman's business here. She is full of talent, and understands your flower making as few do. She has so much taste! Now, in short, my idea is that she should come and live with you. You shall give her only board and lodging, and she shall help you in your manufacture. The lodging will cost you nothing. And I need not say that the keep of the poor little thing is scarcely more. I shall of course take care that all her other wants are supplied. She stands a great deal

too near my heart for me to neglect her! What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

The proposal was far too evidently an advantageous one for poor *vedova* Sappi for her to doubt about accepting it. She knew very well the reputation which little Nina Leti had left in the neighbourhood;—her gentle docility, unwearied industry, and dainty fancy in the delicate manufacture by which she earned her living. And these good qualities were to be turned to her profit, at the simple cost of affording her shelter and a modicum of food. There could be no hesitation about the matter. So it was arranged that Signora Sappi should be ready to receive La Beata at once, on her coming to her,—probably, said Pippo, with some little hesitation, that same day.

Was it that he feared he might have some difficulty in thus quietly sending La Beata back again to the spot and the life from which he had taken her, as soon as it became

convenient to him to do so? Had he any perception of the dull cold misery of the death in life to which he was about to consign the gentle, loving heart, whose only sunshine was the light of his presence and the warmth of his affection? Did he at all realize the conditions of her return to that well remembered dwelling and those patient labours of her young years under circumstances so terribly different? If the long, prison-like hours and patient monotonous labour of that weary, sunless life had so paled that delicate organization both physically and intellectually, that no subsequent removal to open air and sunshine could avail to restore the flower to colour and vigour, even under the different conditions of those early years, what would be the effect of them now? Then if the stimulus of hope was absent, at least the canker of regret was absent also. Then there was a mother to love, and to labour for. Then if there had

been little brightness in the future, there were no black shadows in the past. But now! *Now*, what would the life be in that home so full of old memories, and to her so empty of all else? Did some imperfect conception of the lot to which he was about to condemn her so thrust itself before his imagination, despite his will, as to cause a doubt whether he might be able to consummate the instant execution of the sentence? If so, he had not even yet learned to appreciate justly the entirety of her devotion, her capacity of self-abnegation, and absolute trust.

In returning to the studio, as in coming from it, he did not choose the shortest way. Some feeling there was, which made him unconsciously seek to defer by a few minutes the execution of his purpose. Some brief space he felt that he needed to prepare himself for the "painful necessity" which was before him. He was determined, as he repeated to himself in his new character of a

“strictly respectable man,” to act uprightly and conscientiously in this matter. A little mental discipline was necessary to nerve him for the act of duty required of him; and happily his early education did not leave him at a loss, where to seek for, and how to apply it. The heart, he knew, is desperately wicked, and its impulses utterly untrustworthy. Fortunately he had a better and surer guide to rely on. He had been living these many months past in flagrant sin. He fully admitted and deplored it. It should be amply repented of;—nay, was he not already very sincerely repenting of it? It was his bounden duty that his sin should cease. So far was clear. But what of that mode of putting an end to it suggested by old Maestro Borsoli, and so artlessly repeated to him by the “partner in his sin?” What did “the books” say on this point? Nothing can be clearer. No reparation is due unless a promise of marriage have been made. Promise

of marriage! Had he ever thought of such a thing? Was La Beata (*poveretta!*) a likely sort of girl to have thought of exacting promises of any sort? And even if protestations of life-long fidelity and that sort of thing could be deemed equivalent to a promise of marriage—(and Pippo was strongly of opinion, to the best of his recollection of the text books, that they could not)—why even then, in cases where a distinct promise of marriage has been the means by which a too confiding one has been led astray, Holy Mother Church has wisely laid it down, that no reparation is required where the social position of the man is much above that of the woman.* Now Pippo felt that with his present prospects his position was very far superior to that of La Beata; so that his course of duty was clear. Still the wickedness of the heart's natural promptings made it desirable for him to de-

* This incredible doctrine is accurately taken from the authorized text-book of casuistry.

lay his return home a little, while he fortified himself with these truths, and schooled his moral nature to a fixed determination to do his duty at all costs.

When at length Pippo entered the studio, he found La Beata dressed, and sitting with her knitting in her hand as usual, but with her fingers not, as usual, busy with it, before his easel, gazing sadly at the now nearly finished picture of the poor crazy girl keeping her life-long watch for her lost lover.

"What is the matter, Pippo?" she cried, starting up as she marked the heavy frown on his face. "Something bad has happened. You have been displeased."

"Nothing bad, except your being ill, Tina," he replied. "Do you feel better now?"

"Oh, yes! much better! I feel rather weak and tired as it were, and my head is giddy now and then. But I shall do very well, never fear!"

“Because I wanted to speak to you seriously, Tina, if you are well enough to listen to me.”

“I must be bad, indeed, when I am not well enough for that, dearest! But ‘seriously,’ you say. Something amiss *has* happened. What is it, Pippo?”

“Nothing amiss, I tell you; on the contrary. I told you, you know, before you were obliged to confess that you were ill, that I saw very well that this miserable place was destroying your health. I do not mean to let you stay here, and I have found a place that I think will exactly suit you.”

“But will it suit *you*, Pippo? You must think of the light, you know. That is the first thing. And I assure you I am very well here. I love the dear old room—the first I was ever happy in, Pippo. Besides, I can’t bear that we should change, and perhaps pay more on my account.”

One would suppose she was making it as

difficult for me as possible! thought he, irritably. But it must be said.

“Yes!” he continued; “I have to think of the light, as you say, and it is difficult to find a place that will suit in all ways. It will in any case be necessary for me now to have a better studio, and one where I can conveniently receive the visits of strangers and people of all sorts. At the same time it is absolutely necessary that you should have a more comfortable home, and one where you would have some woman near you. You require more gentle nursing, my poor Tina, than I can give you.”

The poor child was altogether mystified by this sententiously delivered oracle. He seemed to speak kind words, and yet it could not be that he meant they were to separate! Impossible! She looked up into his face with a scared expression of terror in her eye, and caught his hand as she cried, “What is it, Pippo? what are we to do?”

Her mind instinctively clove to that dear "we," as though there had been a spell of safety in it.

"Why this it is, Tina," replied he, "and I am sure you will be reasonable enough to see the truth of what I say. Since it is clear that we cannot find what we each require under the same roof, it is better that we should find it under two. That is all."

She dropped the hand she had been holding while he spoke, and, clasping her own together, looked at him with so piteous an entreaty in her face, that it forced him to seek support in the reflection that he was completing an act of imperative duty.

"Pippo!" she almost shrieked.

"Will it not be best now, Tina? Be reasonable. Consider what will be best for both parties. We shall be very near together, you know."

"Oh, Pippo! Pippo!" she cried, again snatching his hand; "must you send me

away? Are you sure that it will be best for you? Are you quite sure? Think, Pippo, how happy we have been together here! Can there be no more days like those?"

"Now, Tina, this is not talking sense. I am quite sure that what I have said will be best for me, and best for you. As one gets on in life it is impossible that things can always continue the same."

Her head fell on her breast, and she remained perfectly silent for two or three minutes.

"Is there no hope, Pippo?" she said at length, raising her eyes to his hard unsympathizing face. "Will you not think it over again? See now, my own beloved. If it is not well that the great people who come to the studio should see me there, and interfere with me as those English people did, I could stay always in the inner room. I would never, never come out till you called me, Pippo. I should not at all mind that.

I would busy myself with my knitting-needle. I could sit to you whenever you required it. And you always used to say, you know, Pippo, that you never worked so well from any other model as from your poor Tina. Could I not be of use to you still? Oh! think again—think again, Pippo! Don't send me away from you! if you still love me, Pippo," she added, while the tears began to stream down her pale cheeks.

"It is nonsense to talk in that manner, Tina," he replied, with the calm authority of superior reason. "I have told you what I think best, and what I think right for you and for me. Do not let us talk any more about it. You will find that you are making yourself miserable for nothing. I am going to place you where you will be a great deal better off than you have been here. You will very soon admit that I have acted for the best. Surely it is silly to make a mis-

fortune out of the necessity of our living under different roofs for a time."

His conscience smote him as he uttered the last words. But he comforted himself with the reflection that, in pure consideration for the violence of her undisciplined temper, it was better to let the blow, which was inevitable, fall on her by degrees. Tina eagerly marked the words "for a time," and treasured them up for future consolation. She felt, too, that if any intelligible circumstance had parted her and Pippo for a while—such as a journey, for instance, or other such cause—it would be unreasonable to feel it, however she might dislike it, as a source of intolerable misery. Yet she instinctively refused in the present case to draw any comfort from the reflection. Perhaps there was that in the dry hard manner of the arbiter of her destiny, from which the prescient heart gathered more than from the mere words spoken.

“Have pity on me, Pippo!” she replied. “If it is good for you that I should go away from you, it is very wrong of me to be so unwilling. But my selfishness is stronger than I am. I will try to do as you wish me, Pippo, now, as I have always done. You know better than I what is best and right. I will try. But dearest love, it’s very, very hard.”

Pippo by this time was walking up and down the room, majestic in the consciousness of being master of the situation. The point arrived at had been more easily reached than he had ventured to hope. *La Beata* sat plunged in thought for a while, following him in his walk with wistful eyes.

At last she said, speaking scarcely above a whisper, “When am I to go away, Pippo?”

“Well! it is painful to both of us, certainly. And when a painful thing has to be done, it is always best to get it over as soon as may be. It is of no use tormenting one-

self with thinking of it. I thought it would vex you less upon the whole if I said nothing to you till I had made the necessary arrangements. So I have settled for you to sleep in your new home to-night, Tina."

She started, and the look of wild scared terror came back into her eyes. "This night!—to go away this very day! Oh! it is dreadfully sudden. Can there be no delay? One night, Pippo, dear! This our last day. Do that much for your poor Tina."

It would have been easy to accede to this petition, for no positive arrangement had been made with Signora Sappi to the effect that her expected inmate should arrive that day. But Pippo thought that he might have more difficulty in accomplishing his purpose on the morrow than in pushing it to an immediate completion. He could not yet reach a comprehension of the unresisting devotedness, that made his victim plastic in his hands as potter's clay. It would have been

difficult for a man less fully armed by a sense of duty to have resisted that piteous appeal of clinging affection. But Pippo was too prudent a general to run the risk of endangering the victory he had already won, by delay in securing its results.

“No, Tina!” he said; “it must be as I have settled it; and believe me I am acting for the best. When anything disagreeable has to be gone through, it is wisdom, as I said before, to get it over!”

“Get it over, Pippo! Oh! it is worst of all to hear you speak in such a manner!” said the poor child, bursting into a paroxysm of tears. “How can parting be got over, except by coming together again? Let me have one day, Pippo, only one!”

“How can you go on in that way, Tina, when I have told you that it is settled? All this is to the full as painful to me as to you, depend upon it. And you only make it worse for both of us, by thus resisting my plans.”

“No, Pippo! I don’t resist!”—and as she said it, the utter prostration of every remnant of self-will, the piteously helpless resignation expressed in every feature of the pale wan face, and every outline of the frail drooping figure would to a third person have given the force of irony to the words;—“I don’t resist! I will go! I will do all you tell me. I will indeed, Pippo, always and in all things. And it is foolish of me to cry so. But when I am all alone”

A fresh outburst of sobbing, as the idea presented itself to her mind, prevented her from saying more; and the conqueror hastened to take possession of the ground thus abandoned to him.

“You won’t be all alone, Tina,” said he, with unsympathetic incapability of understanding her; “I have told you, you will be with a good kind woman, who will comfort you, and take care of you. Do you think I should propose your being alone? Now, as

you say you will be guided by me, we will do at once what we must do. It will be better that you should have time to make acquaintance with the good soul before bedtime. Come, get your things together, while I go and get a *fiacre* to take us."

"Now directly! Pippo?"

"Well! I think we had better be going," said he, looking at his watch; "it is getting late. And the fact is, I am obliged to see some people this evening. That is one of the reasons why I want you to be where you will have somebody with you. I am obliged, you see, now to be often absent. And I cannot bear leaving you here all alone these long winter evenings. Don't you see, Tina? Now I'll go for the carriage. Be ready when it comes."

And so saying he went out.

For some minutes she remained sitting as he had left her, in a kind of stupor. Then suddenly remembering that she was break-

ing her promise to do all his will, and that he would shortly return, and find her not ready, she got up, and with her head swimming, began hastily, yet with a dreamy sort of uncertainty, as if she hardly knew what she was doing, to gather together the few articles of her slender wardrobe. The short task was completed; Pippo had not yet come with the carriage; and Tina was standing in the middle of the large room, that had been her home, and taking a last look at all the familiar objects, the remembrance of which she felt sure would never be effaced from her mind. Presently her eye rested on a small, unframed canvas, standing against the wall on the floor in a remote corner of the room. It was a portrait of himself, done by Pippo, as artists will, when they have nothing better to do, and was a striking likeness. Tina had often fed her eyes with it, during the hours of Pippo's absence. Now she darted towards it, and taking it in her

hands, was looking on it, while the big tears dropped one after another on the canvas, when he came in.

“I am ready, Pippo!” she said, as he entered with a sort of nervous hurry; “but I may take this with me, may I not? You do not know what a comfort it would be to me. You will give it me, Pippo, won’t you?” she added, as he hesitated before answering her.

He had been on the point of assenting to her wish. But sundry considerations flashed across his mind, which suggested to him the prudence of pausing before he did so. Supposing circumstances should arise which might make it desirable that all youthful indiscretions should be consigned to oblivion! He had no present intention of abandoning the poor girl. God forbid! But nevertheless might it not be as well to avoid leaving in her hands such a memorial? Who knew what connexions she might hereafter form, and into whose hands the picture might fall,

and what use might be made of it? Besides, was it not wiser and better for her that she should *not* have such a means of keeping the memory of by-gones alive? Would it not be better for her to forget?

So he answered: "Nay, Tina, I cannot let you run away with that, at least not now; for I am going to make use of the sketch for a picture I have in my mind." (A picture, planned and studied without any communication with her! This utterly unprecedented novelty inflicted its own separate stab.) "But perhaps at some future time," he added, "I shall have the pleasure of giving it you."

She put the picture down after one long look at it, without saying another word. One additional pang more or less appeared hardly to have the power of rousing her from her almost lethargic state of resignation and acquiescence. But her heart seemed to her to be becoming colder and more numb every minute. She would not have been able to

give any account of the phenomenon to herself, and much less to another ; but she felt in every fibre of her heart the strange coldness of his manner to her, the distance which seemed by some mysterious and irresistible agency to increase every instant between her and him, whom she had deemed a part of herself ; and the impassable barrier which gathering out of nothing like a baleful cloud, was rapidly rendering the passage of all sympathy from the one heart to the other impossible. She neither understood nor reasoned on anything of all this. But the most skilled and subtle analyst of the infinite modes in which one human heart may impress and influence another, could not have felt every gradation of it more acutely.

Pippo began to busy himself with carrying down the few small matters which made the sum of La Beata's worldly goods ; and she continued standing on the spot where she had put the picture out of her hands, gazing

around her in a sort of stupor. Presently he came bounding up the stairs, and with a brisk cheery manner told her that all was ready.

“Come along, Tina!” said he; “don’t stand dreaming over it! We must not keep the fiacre waiting, or the fellow will charge his extra time. Come along!”

She suffered herself to be led down the stairs, and handed into the coach without speaking a word. She had never made the least inquiry as to her destination. And when she heard him order the driver to drive to the *Via del Corso*, the familiar address did not seem to make the smallest impression upon her. As Pippo seated himself in the carriage by her side, she took his hand in hers, and pressed it almost convulsively, while the tears were rolling silently down her cheeks.

“Are you quite, quite sure, Pippo,” she said, after they had been in the carriage some

minutes, "that it is good for you for me to go away?"

"Quite sure that it will be better for both of us," he answered, and that was the only word she spoke during the drive.

Pippo was a little embarrassed at her having asked nothing respecting the place she was to be taken to. He doubted whether it would be best to tell her at once where she was going, or to wait till her arrival told its own story. He decided on the latter, although he was not without some expectation that the unexpected discovery on her part of what home it was that he had selected for her might produce some outbreak of feeling, which in the presence of Signora Sappi might be better suppressed.

But when the coach stopped at the well-known door of her old home, it might have been supposed that *La Beata* had known perfectly well that that was her destination. She made no remark whatever, but proceeded

to climb wearily to the old room on the second floor, as if it had never ceased to be her dwelling. Pippo could not understand it, and fancied that he must have mentioned to her the arrangement he had made inadvertently. The fact was that in the passive apathy of her despair, he might have led her anywhere,—the strangest place would hardly have roused her to remark it. But it seemed to her quite natural that she should return to the old familiar house. The sentence that she was to leave Pippo seemed to her to involve her return thither. All her life between her departure from that house and the present was wiped out and annihilated; and it appeared a matter of course to her to find herself brought back to the point from which she started. It was like the return to the ordinary routine of daily life in the fairy story-books, after a charmed excursion into fairy-land.

“Good day, Signora Sappi!” said Pippo, as

the widow appeared at her door to receive her lodger; "Here we are! She is not very well to-day, poor Tina; and is a good deal beat with making the change, you know. But she knows it is for the best; she will be better after a night's rest; and I have no doubt that you will get on excellently well together. This is Signora Sappi, Tina, your new landlady."

"Good day, Signora!" said she, sitting down on the first chair she could see in the well-known room, for it was as much as she could do to stand; "excuse me, I am very tired to-day."

"I hope, Signora, that I shall be able to make you comfortable here," said the woman, kindly.

"It is very good of you to receive me," replied Tina, and then added hurriedly, as if the thought flashed across her that it was necessary to save Pippo from any suspicion

or blame in the matter ; “ It is best for me to leave Pippo, because because ”

But as the reasons were not at hand, Pippo put in quickly—

“ The studio I have is not a place, Signora Sappi, where she can have the comforts her health requires. With you here she will soon get well.”

A very unobservant eye could hardly have failed to see that physical ill health was at all events not the principal of La Beata's ailments. Her features had all the traces of much and recent weeping, and she appeared so utterly absorbed by some oppressing sorrow as to be scarcely able to constrain herself to take cognizance of what was passing before her. But the worthy widow Sappi manifested neither surprise nor curiosity at what she saw. She had lived—maid, wife, and widow—more than fifty years in the world, and the entire plot, beginning, progress, and *dénoue-*

ment of the little drama, one scene of the last act of which was passing before her, was quite as perfectly intelligible to her, as if she had witnessed the action of the entire piece.

To the world-worn widow it was the old, old story;—a “disgrazia,” not necessarily involving any moral turpitude on the part of any of the actors concerned in it—possibly admitting of mitigation by due use of candles and rosaries in the proper quarters, but evidently not calling for interference on her part. Though she felt, therefore, no indignation against the handsome young artist, as she opened the door for him to depart, she was none the less anxious as she returned on closing it after him, to say or do anything within the limits of her simple understanding and small power to alleviate the sorrows of the victim.

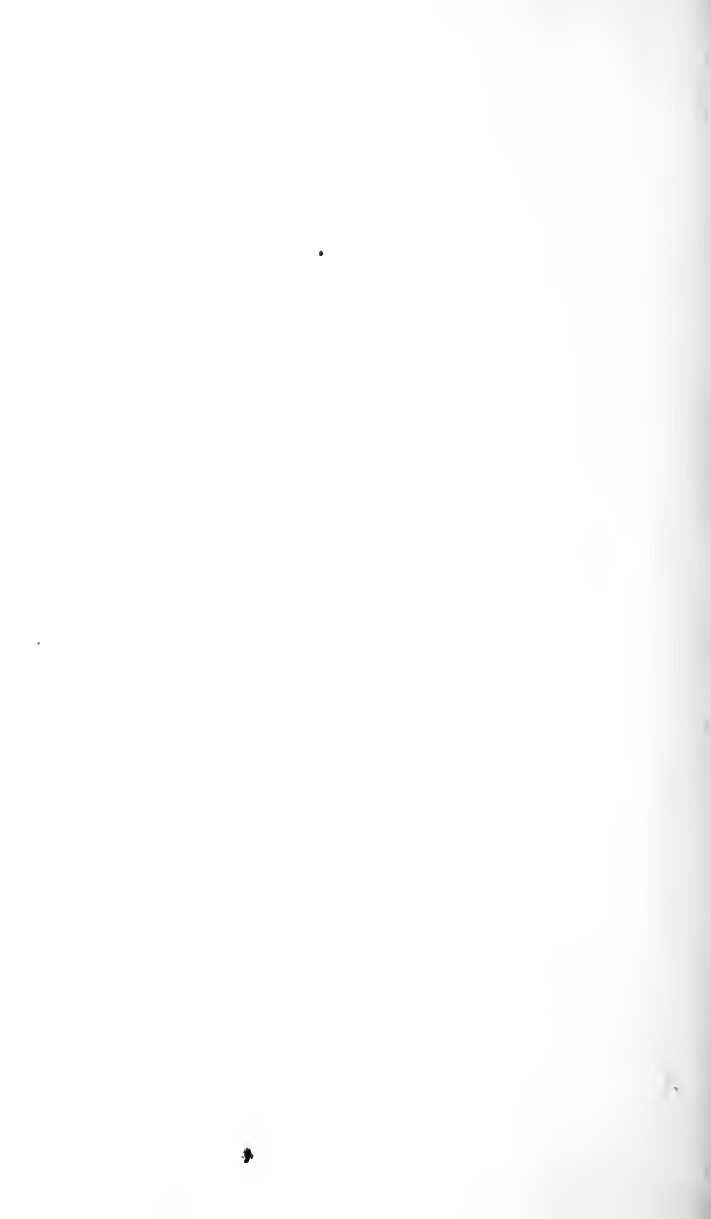
And it is easy to imagine that consolations drawn from such a view of the case were more

tolerable to La Beata's unswerving fidelity of affection, than any based on blame of her heart's idol could have been. It is true, that Signora Sappi's first well-meant attempts to treat the case as one already arrived at the stage, which to her experienced eyes it had clearly reached, were met by vehement and indignant protestations of Pippo's unalterable affection, and the temporary nature of their separation. But as soon as the widow perceived that her patient was in an earlier phase of her misfortune than she had imagined, she adopted her tone and treatment accordingly, only lamenting to herself that so much misery still remained to be developed from what she too well knew to be the inevitable future.

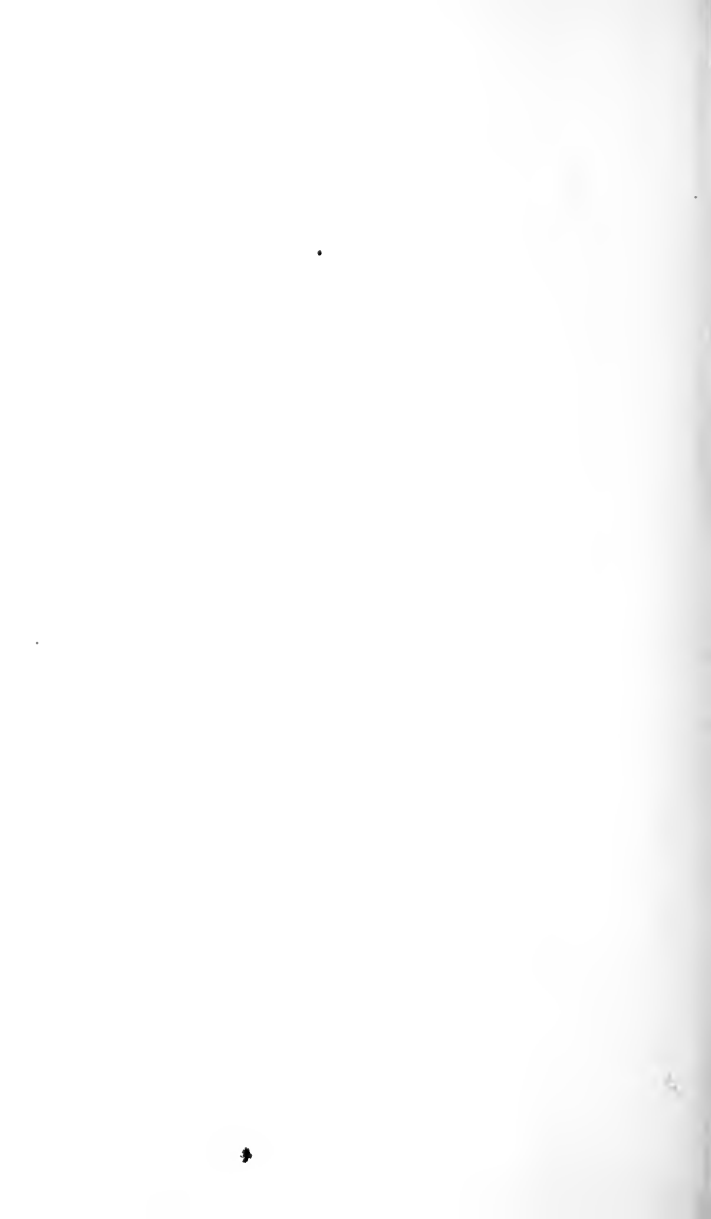
And the next day Tina was in her old place, at her old occupation among the bits of painted calico and waxed paper, very wan, very silent, very miserable, anxiously en-

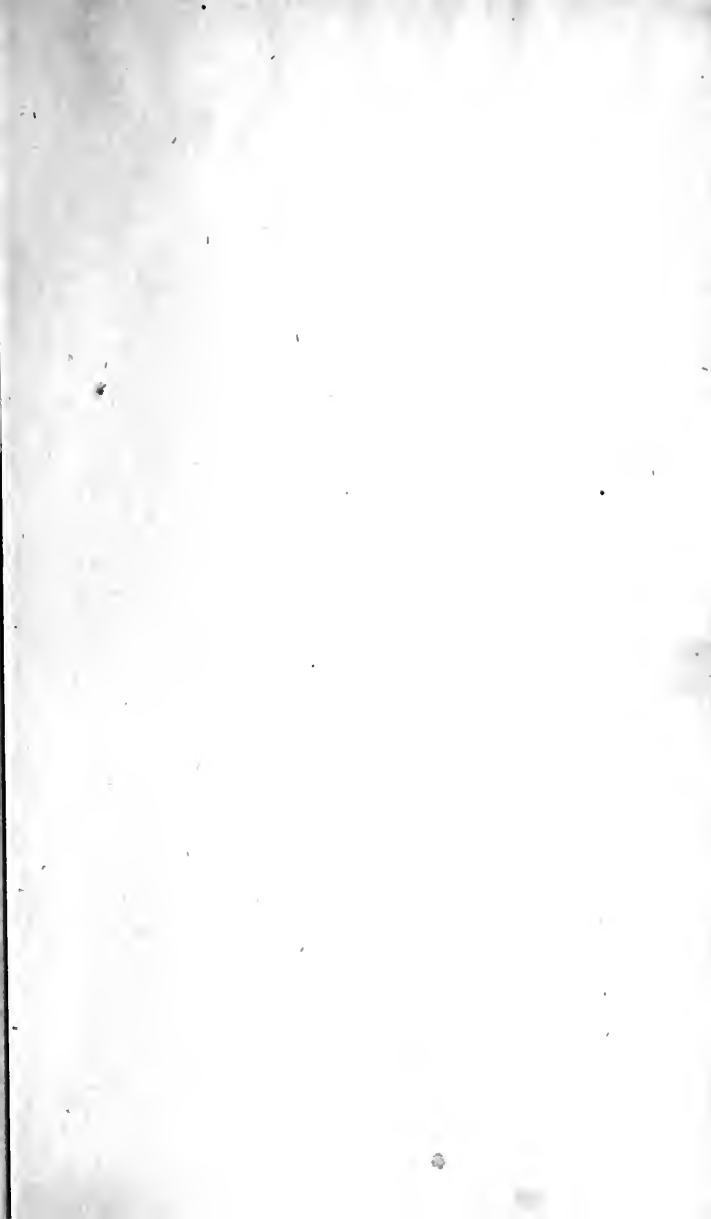
deavouring to do her utmost in the interest of her entertainer, but with the best part of her mind in her ear, painfully watching during all the long hours of the day for the footstep on the stair, which came not.

END OF VOL. I.









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